

FOUNDATIONS FOR DIALOGUE BETWEEN  
JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

by  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION. . . . .	1
A. The Purpose of This Project . . . . .	1
B. How It Began and What Developed . . . . .	3
CHAPTER	
I. DIALOGUE IN GENEVA. . . . .	8
II. MISSION TO CAIRO. . . . .	16
Getting Started . . . . .	17
A. New York City. . . . .	18
B. Vatican City - June 25 . . . . .	19
C. The World Council of Churches - June 27-29. . . . .	20
D. The Arab Republic of Egypt - June 29-July 11 . . . . .	25
Acknowledgements. . . . .	32
Results . . . . .	32
Findings. . . . .	34
III. THE HERMENEUTICAL POSITION. . . . .	37
IV. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE. . . . .	42
A. Listening for the Sake of Abraham. . . . .	42
1. Abraham and Isaac . . . . .	49
2. Abraham and the Christian Faith . . . . .	54
3. Judaism and Abraham Now . . . . .	58
4. Abraham and Ishmael . . . . .	59
B. Speaking for the Sake of Christ. . . . .	67
1. Witness . . . . .	67
2. Syncretism. . . . .	91
3. The Substance of Witness. . . . .	94
V. GOAL. . . . .	99
VI. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE WORK ON THE GOAL . . . . .	108
VII. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCHES . . . . .	112
(What the Churches Can Do to Help)	
BIBLIOGRAPHY. . . . .	115

TO ELINOR

## ABSTRACT

Dialogue is defined as listening and speaking: listening for the sake of Abraham, speaking for the sake of Christ.

The hermeneutical position is that the Old and New Testaments, although the words of men, are nevertheless the Word of God as they testify to Jesus Christ the living Word. Fidelity to the intentions of the Biblical writers and to the sitz im leben leads to more authenticity in present interpretation.

Abraham's place in salvation history is searched out as well as his relationship to both Isaac and Ishmael. Abraham's call and the nature of his faith (Genesis 15:6) are theological interpreted. The place of Abraham in Judaism (Israelites), in the Church and in Islam (Ishmaelites) is examined. The continuing place of Judaism in salvation history is sustained. Based upon careful analysis of the Abraham saga, it is maintained that Ishmael (hence Islam) also is and continues to be within salvation history. The Quran is used as an additional resource. Judaism, Christianity and Islam are, up to a point, theological brothers--for the sake of Abraham.

Speaking for the sake of Christ means witness. The "Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20)" and Acts 1:8 (...You shall be my witnesses...) are studied exegetically, compared and contrasted. It is mentioned that "You shall be my witnesses" is the first activity of the Church vis-a-vis non-Christians whereas "Make disciples" is the catechetical, teaching function of the Church for those who have been received. To understand "make disciples" otherwise leads to moralism and coercion as the history of the Church too often attests.

From these considerations it can be seen that there is a distinction between conversion (the work of the Holy Spirit) and witness, the task of Christians under the "Plenary Commission": "You shall be my witnesses." This distinction between conversion and witness has a liberating effect in Jewish-Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Witness in nature is not coercive. Any theology of dialogue should include the distinction between conversion and witness.

A dialogue at the World Council of Churches with Dr. W.A. Visser t'Hooft, Rev. Goerge B. Grose, Dr. A. Muhsin El-Biali and Rabbi Leo M. Abrami is included as is a report of an historic visit to Cairo by Grose, Abrami and El-Biali.

This professional project has as background the pioneering experiences of Grose, Abrami and El-Biali in

Judeao-Christian-Islamic dialogue from 1971 to 1975. They have lectured together at sixty-five American colleges and universities. The goal of this work is to foster a climate of dialogue in the U.S. and abroad. The Program, directed by George Grose, is associated with the Office on Christian-Jewish Relations of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and with the Blaisdell Institute, Claremont, California.

In this project the Church is encouraged to be open to real listening to both Judaism and Islam because of Abraham and to speak to both Judaism and Islam out of the Christian Faith. This encouragement is based on the exegetical and historical studies of this project and inferences therefrom.

It is affirmed that Jesus who is alive is leading the Church into this kind of a new future with Judaism and Islam.

## INTRODUCTION

### A. The Purpose of This Project

Not all communication is dialogue. Rabbi Jakob J. Petuchowski describes dialogue as:

...talk among equals, born of mutual respect, and with full awareness of where the division lies, dedicated to the furtherance of a shared concern.<sup>1</sup>

For the purpose of inter-religious dialogue in the confraternity of Judaism, Christianity and Islam as treated in this project, dialogue will be understood as listening and speaking. If in ordinary discourse real listening is rare, so also is real speaking. The definition of dialogue as listening and speaking, simple though it is, has far-reaching consequences for the Christian Church as the Church seeks to relate to Judaism and Islam in our time.

As Christianity reaches out to Judaism and Islam it will be inspired by its Lord: "We love because he first loved us." (I John 4:19) W. A. Visser t'Hooft writing in his book, No Other Name (1963), said:

The more seriously the Christian Church takes its center, the more universal it becomes...Dag Hammar-skjold...speaking to the Evanston Assembly of the

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<sup>1</sup>John Shelby Spong and Jack Daniel Spiro, Dialogue (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p. 31.



World Council of Churches (1954) quoted the following words from the Main Theme of the Assembly: 'The Cross is that place at the centre of the world's history... where all men and all nations without exception stand revealed as enemies of God...and yet where all men stand revealed as beloved of God, precious in his sight.' Hammarskjold continued: 'So understood, the Cross, although it is the unique fact on which the Christian Churches base their hope, should not separate those of the Christian faith from others, but should instead be that element in their lives which enables them to stretch out their hands to peoples of other creeds in the feeling of universal brotherhood.'<sup>2</sup>

By such considerations of Jesus Christ and his cross the relationship of Christianity to Judaism and Islam is made vivid. Nevertheless, such "Christian Universalism" applies to all persons--not just Jews and Muslims. Notwithstanding the doubts and hesitations of some in the Christian community, there is an unusual character in the relationship between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It is an historical and theological camaraderie not shared by other world religions. It constitutes a special case.

Although at times it may seem so, the relationship of Christianity to Judaism and the relationship of Christianity to Islam is not under consideration. What is under consideration is the relationship of Judaism, Christianity and Islam to each other from a Christian perspective. This way of stating the matter is consonant with Jewish-Christian-Muslim dialogue which is listening and speaking.

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<sup>2</sup>W. A. Visser t'Hooft, No Other Name (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), pp. 114-115.

This project will seek to show that the Christian Faith contains foundations for dialogue between Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the heritage of Abraham; and in Christian witness. Goals and strategies will be articulated; and finally implications for the Church, drawn from these findings, will be shown. Biblical, Quranic and historical resources together with the experiences of Rev. George B. Grose, Rabbi Leo M. Abrami and Dr. A. Muhsin El-Biali during five years of inter-religious dialogue (1971-1976) form the core of this study. The faith of the writer and certain hermeneutical principles will guide the handling of this core material.

#### B. How It Began and What Developed.

Inter-religious dialogue--Judaism, Christianity and Islam is some kind of a new creation in which I am privileged to participate. For me it is both an Odyssey--a series of wanderings--and a pilgrimage--a calling.

Where did it begin? In 1963 Dr. Cassius Derby Silver, who received Christian baptism at age 89, made it possible for me to represent the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., at the General Synod of the Waldensian Church in Italy. My wife, Elinor, was with me on the European part of the trip. I continued into the mid-East and the far-East. I was struck by the kinship

I felt with the people of Egypt and Israel--Muslims and Jews. I came to wonder at it. In 1966 I returned to Harvard Divinity School as a Merrill Fellow to study again with Krister Stendahl in New Testament studies. Stendahl's profound grasp of the Judaic roots of Christianity has been most helpful to me.

From a twelve year pastorate in a college community we came to the chaplaincy of Whittier College in March of 1970. In May occurred the Cambodian invasion, the killing of students at Kent State and Jackson State. Campuses everywhere exploded in protest--some violent some non-violent. Whittier College had superb student leadership at that time. There was ardent protest, but no violence. The students said, "Remember the Quaker heritage!" although at the time there were not more than a dozen Quakers in the student body. The student leaders were Steve Kramer, Steve Gore, John Rothmann, Dick Jones and Denny Stovall: three Jews and two Christians. Whittier had nearly 200 foreign students. Most of them from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Lebanon and Iran. Such, for me, is the preparation for the dialogue.

In May of 1971 I invited A. Muhsin El-Biali, Ph.D., Director of the Islamic Foundation of Southern California, to address a convocation at Whittier College. John Francis Rothmann, a young Jewish educator whom I had known when he was a student leader, joined us at lunch. From that

conversation grew a combined lecture "Monotheism and Revelation" from the perspectives of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Our first lecture was given for the students of Whittier College. It was an electric experience. The students encouraged us to go to other colleges and universities.

From the outset we agreed that we would speak to matters at the heart of each of the historic western religions. The three of us had experienced the shallowness of much inter-religious dialogue. We could not adopt the premise that to operate from the least common denominator was somehow a show of good-will. Instead we would attempt to express what each of these religions really means. We would be free to deal alike with uniqueness, sameness, difference, continuity and discontinuity. In this we would trust one another and the truth which our inter-action might reveal. Our purpose was to reduce suspicion and to increase levels of caring through the exploration of points of contact between the three religions of revelation.

Since 1971 my colleagues and I have lectured at sixty-five colleges and universities. In 1975 we were invited to The University of the Pacific, Congregation Beth El, Berkeley, The Inter-Church Center, New York, The Southern California School of Theology, Scripps College

through the Blaisdell Institute, conferences at the Vatican and the World Council of Churches, The Ecumenical Institute, Chateau de Bossey, Cairo by the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, The School of Medicine at the University of Southern California, Notre Dame University, Earlham College and School of Religion, Indiana-Purdue, Rockford College, Beloit College, Miami University, Goshen College, Valparaiso University, The Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard University, The Commonwealth School, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Boston College.

Certain people have meant a great deal. First of all, my wife, Elinor, who has understood both me and my work and has given me her unwavering support. Our children, Heidi, Mary, John and Nina have given their active interest. I cannot forget others--our parents, Dr. and Mrs. Wilbur D. Grose and Dr. and Mrs. Dwight H. Uyeno; Muhsin El-Biali, my brilliant and steadfast Muslim colleague; John Rothmann who was with us at the beginning for two years, his place then taken by Leo Abrami; Richard Arena and Robert O'Brien of Whittier College; Richard P. Ettinger, Jr.; Walter Garcia, President of Rio Hondo College; William Barr, Associate Dean of Student Affairs, University of the Pacific; The people of Mount Olive Presbyterian Church and La Mirada Methodist Church; The Reverend Hylton Sanders; The Reverend Klane Robison; Col. Irving Salomon, Knight of

St. Gregory; William Weiler, my colleague at the National Council of Churches; Joseph Hough, Dean of the Southern California School of Theology; Melvin Sands, my professor of Judaism; Krister Stendahl, Dean of Harvard Divinity School; Harold Case, late President of Boston University; George A. Buttrick; Mr. and Mrs. Charles T. Heberle. I have learned from them all. Last I would speak of the young people whose interest and penetrating concerns have made all the difference.

## CHAPTER I

### DIALOGUE IN GENEVA

On June 27, 1975, Mrs. Grose and I, Rabbi Leo Abrami and Dr. A. Muhsin El-Biali had lunch with Dr. W. A. Visser t'Hooft, Honorary President of the World Council of Churches, Dr. Franz von Hammerstein, head of the World Council committee on the Jewish People, and a member of the World Council staff whose name I do not have. The conversation at this luncheon at the World Council Center in Geneva well expresses the nature of our work and points to the foundations for dialogue between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The "Dramatis Personae" are Visser t'Hooft (VTH); Muhsin El-Biali (M); George Grose (G); Leo Abrami (L); and staff person (S).

VTH: When you say that you are doing something new in the United States, I personally think that you are a little too modest--because I think that what you are doing is not only something new in the United States but in the world; for here and there we've had meetings--also meetings with World Council participation or under the auspices of the World Council where representatives of Islam, of the

Jewish People, of the Christian Churches have met together--but it was always something incidental--it was just one meeting--and nothing more or less permanent of this character came out. Now you are on sort of a permanent affair and both for tomorrow which takes on an international character. I think you are really breaking new ground, and that's why I think your mission is of the highest importance.

M: This means a lot to my friend and my brother, George Grose, because he believes in this wholeheartedly.

L: We all do.

M: He is a firm believer in this. And it is a matter of conviction with all of us. It wasn't easy--as I was saying earlier. It is not easy now. Every-time we talk about things--same old biases are always bound to come to the fore, but if we learn how to (in my judgment and I would appreciate your comments)--how to overcome these things and to really appreciate each other as brothers and sisters under God, each following his own way to approach and to reach out to the same God--the God of us all--that would be our mission--and we have succeeded if we are able just to give that message to our audiences.



G: And the personal sacrifice is for each of us.

VTH: Yes, it is a sacrifice. But I think you can also make a case for the thesis that what you are doing is at the same time, especially on the long range, a service to the purely concrete historical situation. And, while we don't want to talk politics, I personally think that it is there that the only hope for a solution in the Near East lies--in some form of new understanding between the religions. I think of the future of Jerusalem and so on. Unless there is some kind of new understanding, it will remain a tremendous source of misunderstanding and could even create a most horrible war situation.

M: Yes, Indeed.

VTH: And therefore from that point of view also I personally am in favor of this kind of thing.

G: One of our cares--which we know we must do--is to devote ourselves to the religious dimension and also then not to deal with the political dimension by choice. Now the political dimension as such is important, and there are others working on it. But our portion of the responsibility is not that. And we know that.

VTH: But I think you could go at least this far-- saying what you are doing religiously has an importance for political matters--if you don't work it out in detail.

G: Indeed. But we are, under the circumstances of today's world, extremely careful about any political identifications--for it would stand in the way of what we know we can do in the theological, religious part. It's a self-imposed limitation for the sake of the greater purpose.

M: My idea is that, at least, let us give the diplomats a chance! (VTH laughs.) But religion will prevail. That is my conviction, in the final analysis.

VTH: Personally, I tried frightfully hard--a long time ago--to get two men together: Martin Buber of Israel and Charles Malik of Lebanon, and unfortunately I failed. They were both in principle willing, but they were both too much involved in their own political situation. I never got them together. I have such great admiration for both of those men. If men of that level could talk together something ought to happen.

S: I would have many questions to ask you. But let me ask you one question and the question is: The Communist states that finally Christianity or the monotheistic religions that believe in one God-- He states that is a fiction anyhow, that it is opium for the people. Now whether it is Islamic opium or Christian opium or Jewish opium--it is opium all the same. If placed within an Asian context a Hindu or a Buddhist who will also say in their way that their God, that one God is a fiction-- the Hindu in his way and the Buddhist in his way. The Buddhist quite more distinctly. What kind of implications does this have? How do we stand on this? What kind of implications does this have within our own life? I do not know whether you have been faced already with this question. It is indeed a very basic question in our time. How do we deal with this?

G: Nothing seems to happen in life according to plan-- at least not according to my plan. It is enough for me to begin to touch the hem of the garment of the nature of what we three are trying to do. I'm just beginning to understand what it means for the monotheistic religions, and I would now know how to deal with Buddhism, for example, vis-a-vis this.

We have not experienced it yet. You (VTH) spoke of the matter of Malik and Buber. Now we are only making the beginning of a beginning--so these other areas exist. I remember Thomas Kelly, the Quaker mystic, who at some point in his life was suddenly aware of the vastness of the human problems. It overwhelmed him, And he was led to see that he was not called upon to attempt to minister to all the problems that existed--but rather to certain ones that he would be called upon to do. Then his life would have a focus. What you (S) raise is real; I don't know what to do about it.

L: The question that you ask is, of course, a basic one in religion. Do you believe in God or don't you? Of course the second question that comes is, What do you mean by God? And so it is a rhetorical question--you do believe or you don't believe. My question would be: What do you believe? What are your values? What is your value system and on what is it based? Is it a sufficient interpretation of human destiny? Does it make sense to you? So its a classical question. We can't resolve it. We can't prove the existence of God. We can't disprove it. (M: Ah..) We can only become sensitive from a philosophical point of view.

M: No! As people of monotheistic religions--as we stand--we have to be very specific about the issue of God. I am talking specifically from my Islamic viewpoint. We have had discussions with Buddhists and Hindus in Los Angeles. One of the leaders of the Hindu traditions said, "We do not believe in one God. We believe in various gods and many gods. And God can take the form of any human being. He manifests himself in various ways." And this was to me appalling. In fact it hurt my own sensitivities as a Muslim. And then we had a Buddhist once in the Buddhist temple. And the Buddhist said, "Why do you have to mention God all the time?" And I told him simply because if I do not mention God, the content of my religion would be void--would be invalidated. So to you God is nothing. To me God is everything! Because I am the servant of that God. So that makes us at opposite sides of the pole in this case. So we have nothing in common when it comes to the idea of divinity of God when it comes to the Buddhists and Hindus. We are historical religions. We are grounded in history.

VTH: And that is why it is not enough to say that we have three monotheistic religions. (M: We have one!) No, you might go further. No, I wouldn't say one.

But I would say that the really important thing is that these three religions teach that God makes himself specifically known. In other words they are definite religions of revelation. (G: Yes!) which the others are not. Of specific revelation (G: Yes!) and that is more than just monotheism.

M: Doctor, we have a theme that we have developed, and this has been the hall-mark of our dialogue. It is called "Monotheism and Revelation." That is the main theme of the dialogue...Your talk is very inspiring!

## CHAPTER II

### MISSION TO CAIRO

This is a report by Rev. George B. Grose, Director of the Program for Inter-Religious Dialogue which is associated with the Office on Christian-Jewish Relations of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. It concerns work undertaken in New York City; the Vatican; the World Council of Churches in Geneva; and Cairo, the Arab Republic of Egypt. June 22, 1975-- July 14, 1975.

This mission was carried out by Rev. George Grose; Rabbi Leo M. Abrami of Congregation Beth El, Berkeley, California; and Dr. A. Muhsin El-Biali, Director of the Islamic Foundation of Southern California. Mrs. Grose (Elinor R.) accompanied her husband and rendered invaluable help.

This report is placed here, before the textual and theological work, so that the reader may have a feeling for the human dynamics of dialogue between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Indeed, one can safely read between the lines of the theological material which follows and find that the theological task is not far removed from life after all.

## GETTING STARTED

It was our intention from the beginning that the three of us who had worked together these four years in dialogue should go to lecture for the National Council of Churches, the World Council of Churches, confer with the Vatican and lecture in Egypt. However, in January of 1976, it became doubtful that Rabbi Abrami could accompany us to Egypt due to the prevailing political tensions; yet the uniqueness of our work consists largely in the fact that the three monotheistic religions--Judaism, Christianity and Islam--are represented in dialogue.

As the time drew near for our departure we were faced with a cliff-hanger. We would not say that Rabbi Abrami was not going against the possibility that, at the last minute, he might be able to go. The break-through came because, on June 6, President Anwar Sadat reopened the Suez Canal. This action gave new substance to peace negotiations, and consequently, on June 11, I was told that Rabbi Abrami could accompany us into Egypt as a member of our dialogue team.

Our trip began eleven days later!



#### A. NEW YORK CITY

Rabbi Abrami, Dr. El-Biali and I paid a significant visit to the Inter-Church Center before leaving for Rome. We were invited and sponsored by the Office on Christian-Jewish Relations of the National Council of Churches and the Program Agency of the United Presbyterian Church (USA). Thus, on June 23 we spoke on "Monotheism and the Sanctity of Human Life" for a gathering of religious and academic leaders from the greater New York metropolitan area.

The audience gave close attention to the presentation of our dialogue, made valuable comments and asked searching questions. During the discussion period, Rabbi Mark Tannenbaum, a brilliant leader of American Judaism, made a speech expressing cynicism about the value of dialogue between Judaism, Christianity and Islam as a contribution to mutual understanding and continued his speech by attacking the positions advanced by our colleague, Rabbi Abrami. Abrami defended himself with grace and skill, and Dr. Tannenbaum's cynicism was unable to destroy the purpose of our presentation to reduce suspicion and increase levels of caring or the positive mutual sharing which ensued. Curiously enough, Dr. Tannenbaum approached us after the lecture about being included in the next trip to Egypt.

As we continued our journey to the Vatican and the World Council of Churches, Dr. El-Biali and Rabbi Abrami spoke to me several times about the warm way in which we had been received by Dr. and Mrs. William Weiler at breakfast in their home and by Dr. Vernon Smith and his colleagues at lunch. Indeed, they commented several times also about the support we felt from the National Council and Presbyterian people during the dialogue presentation.

B. VATICAN CITY - June 25

The Rev. Pierre-M. de Contenson, OP, Secretary of the Roman Catholic Commission for Judaism, explained that a special relationship exists between the Church and the Jews; and thence the Commission for Judaism is part of the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity. He did not perceive the same relationship between the Church and Islam. He was very gracious and answered our questions in depth.

Cardinal Sergio Pignedoli, head of the Secretariat for Non-Christians, welcomed us in his private residence. His Secretariat has to do with Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, etc. He greeted us with the words, "All men are good!" He proceeded to explain that Muslims will receive salvation under the provisions of the Catholic teaching of the "baptism of desire." He said that it is natural for people to want to share their own religion so that other people

will be like them. However, he nearly dismissed any thought of the evangelistic mission of the Church and stated that he had no interest in proselytizing. While stating that these were his own views, he was every inch a Prince of the Church and is widely spoken of as the likely next Pope. He would be hard to beat in personal warmth and graciousness.

#### C. THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES - June 27-29

My hope and my intention, which I put in writing to the Committee on the Church and the Jewish People, was that we meet with World Council leadership and a few other carefully selected people and that we lecture at the Ecumenical Institute, Chateau de Bossey. However, a more elaborate schedule than I had wished for us had been arranged, although I had requested a simpler schedule with just the specifics mentioned above. Just before leaving New York, we were given a cable urging us to accept an invitation to dinner at the synagogue in Geneva. On advice, I agreed that we would accept, although I was not keen about it. In planning the itinerary, I had in mind that we should try to do a few things well in each place to avoid undue fatigue and possible misunderstanding.

The return cable stating that we would accept the invitation to dinner at the synagogue took two days to be delivered to the World Council. Because of this brief delay

in response, the synagogue decided to cancel the dinner. This was a large disappointment to Rabbi Abrami, who had once been their cantor.

The day of our arrival in Geneva (June 26), Dr. Franz von Hammerstein, our host at the WCC, received a phone call from the Arab League stating that Rabbi Abrami's life would be in danger if he appeared at the mosque in Geneva. This grave warning had the effect of taking a reception at the mosque off our schedule.

The next morning, June 27, we met at the World Council headquarters with twenty-five pastors from Westphalia to whom we explained the rationale of our work together. It was a very friendly and open exchange of ideas. Apparently, at the present time in the German Protestant Church, they are discussing whether or not dialogue with non-Christians is theologically desirable or possible. The pastors were highly trained and very responsible in their attitudes and comments.

From the conference with the pastors of Westphalia, we went to a much-awaited luncheon with Dr. W. A. Visser t' Hooft, Honorary President of the World Council of Churches. Minutes before Dr. Visser t'Hooft arrived, Dr. von Hammerstein told us of the persons invited to the reception at the WCC. The list included someone from the Israeli diplomatic mission in Geneva. (The Arab nations

have not yet given Israel diplomatic recognition!) My Muslim colleague, Dr. El-Biali, stated emphatically that he would not attend the reception. That took care of the WCC reception; it was canceled. I was able, by the grace of God, to assure Dr. El-Biali that no other surprises of this sort were in store about one minute before Dr. Visser t' Hooft entered the room.

The singular manner in which Dr. Visser t' Hooft extended himself to endorse and support our work is illustrated by two quotations taken from a tape recording of our conversation with him:

When you say that you are doing something new in the United States, I think you are a little too modest, because this is equally new for the world. It takes on an international character. Thus I believe your mission is of the highest importance...One could make a case for the thesis that what you are doing--especially in the long run--is a service to the purely concrete historical situation. The only hope for a solution in the Near East lies in some form of new understanding between the religions.

Time has only enhanced the stature and intellectual acuity of this man. His grasp of the issues, both political and theological, in our work was most inspiring and beneficial.

After the luncheon, as we crossed the foyer of the World Council, we were stopped by two members of the Jewish community in Geneva. One of them, a Mr. Litmann, engaged Rabbi Abrami in a bitter argument about the appropriateness of Rabbi Abrami going to Egypt on a mission in the

company of a Christian minister and a Muslim imam. He launched a vitriolic attack on Rabbi Abrami's integrity as a Jew. Abrami had given him a news release which he refused to return. At this point, Dr. El-Biali approached and he turned his attack on Dr. El-Biali in terms of anti-Jewish material published in Egypt during the Nasser regime. Dr. El-Biali coolly pointed out to him that the material was out of date. Mr. Litmann then tried to involve me in taking sides on the several issues he had raised. I refused and told him that our purposes were reconciliation and mutual understanding. Mr. Litmann then made other inflammatory statements which Dr. von Hammerstein quenched with forthrightness and courage. We were at last able to disengage. Later, Dr. von Hammerstein told his wife that Rev. Grose and Dr. El-Biali were the only calm ones. Rabbi Abrami can be forgiven a little excitement. After all, he received the first blast.

The next morning, June 28, we presented our theme, "Monotheism and Revelation," at the Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches at Chateau de Bossey. We then discussed the theme with forty-five pastors, priests and missionaries. Their questions were excellent and wide-ranging. We were asked to discuss the State of Israel as a theological reality; the authority of the Quran; the place of women in Islam and Judaism; syncretism;

hunger; spirituality; how to listen and speak; in our relationship with God union as differentiated from communion; Jews for Jesus. We spoke in English and the translators did their best to put our words into French and German. We stayed for lunch and many told us that our work that day was the highlight of their two-week session. It was said that, unlike other speakers they had heard during the session, we had answered each question directly without sidestepping difficult issues. Elaine Blancy, Director of the Institute, extended to us an invitation to return the summer of 1976 to conduct a two-week session.

The following morning, June 29, while we were at breakfast at Hotel Suisse, Mrs. Grose was paged for a telephone call. A man's voice said, "I am the one who caused the disturbance yesterday at the World Council of Churches. Has your husband left yet for Cairo?" My wife called me to the phone. The man said, "You may remember me from our discussion at the World Council of Churches yesterday when we had some disagreements." I said, "I don't recall." He went on talking about the disagreements. I said, "With whom am I speaking?" He went on talking. I said that I do not talk on the telephone with anyone unless I know with whom I am speaking. After a pause, he said, "My name is Litmann. And I want to know why the reception yesterday at the World Council was

canceled." I said, "You are not entitled to know. Good-bye, sir." I left that afternoon for Cairo.

#### D. THE ARAB REPUBLIC OF EGYPT - June 29-July 11

We were welcomed at Cairo Airport by a delegation of officials from the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs and reporters from Akhbar El-Yom (Cairo Daily News). We were taken to the Nile Hilton where we were guests of the Supreme Council. Mrs. Grose was ill, and the rest of us were exhausted by the strenuous efforts of the previous week in New York, Rome and Geneva. We rested until July 3.

We began our mission in Cairo on Thursday, July 3, with an audience with His Excellency, Muhammad Tawfik Oweida, Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs. His Excellency, an imposing figure, spoke in Arabic through an interpreter, although he understands English. He welcomed us and expressed interest in the nature of our work. I expressed our appreciation for the unprecedented invitation from the Supreme Council to come to Egypt and for the hospitality which was being shown to us. I explained that our work was an open dialogue disclosing both areas of mutual belief as well as areas of differences or uniqueness, thus creating a climate of understanding. Secondly, I noted that we were the only ones engaged in religious dialogue with an imam as a colleague.



Thirdly, I advised him that we had spoken at fifty American colleges and universities.

Minister Oweida indicated his approval of our work in Judeo-Christian-Islamic dialogue and Dr. El-Biali's place in it. His Excellency said that doctrinal matters could lead to dispute, but that everyone should encourage the young to embrace spiritual ideals. He said that belief in God must be lifted up over against both atheism and communism. He spoke of God being everywhere--in trees, in one's own physique. He stressed the importance of meditation.

Minister Oweida assured us emphatically that Egypt had no desire to drive Israel into the sea, but that Egypt would not rest until all Egyptian land had been returned. He made this statement twice for emphasis.

Rabbi Abrami expressed his appreciation at being included in this historic venture and declared that Jewish leadership was pleased that a rabbi had been invited to Egypt in company with a Christian minister and a Muslim imam. He stated his own views on a just settlement in the Middle East.

At this point I spoke of the National Council of Churches' Resolution on the Middle East as follows:

"...We call upon Israel and the Palestinians to recognize the right of the other party to the same self-determination

they desire for themselves. We affirm the right of Israel to exist as a free nation within secure borders. We equally affirm the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and a national entity..."

Dr. El-Biali then invited Minister Oweida to come to the United States to join us in dialogue.

We again thanked Minister Oweida for his graciousness and hospitality and thus ended an audience which had never before happened in the history Egypt.

Nevertheless, the next day, July 4, was even more full of meaning for me. There was a reception at the American Embassy, but another opportunity opened up for us. Dr. El-Biali took us to Zamalek Mosque in Garden City, Cairo, for the Friday Prayer.

For non-Muslims to be present in a mosque during the Friday Prayer is unheard of. Our coming had been unannounced. After leaving our shoes at the door, we entered with the other worshippers. Dr. El-Biali led us to a room overlooking the main floor.

Soon the floor below us, as well as our room, was filled with men--row upon row--whom the imam now began to lead in prayer (Salat). Friday Prayer consists of two ritual movements (ruku), each comprised of seven actions, each of which is accompanied by recitations beginning with the takbir "God is most great." The opening surah of the

Kuran is recited; praise and glory are given to God; two prostrations follow in which the toes of both feet, both knees, both hands and the forehead touch the ground. Between prostrations a prayer for mercy and protection is offered. The rakah ends with the worshippers in a standing position saying a final takbir. A sermon as an exposition of the Kuran was given by the imam. On this Friday, the theme was, "Islam and Democracy," delivered with great fluency and vigor.

The worshippers saw us, but it was as if they hardly noticed. Dr. El-Biali was among the worshippers, but behind the 1000 men at worship sat a Jewish rabbi, a Christian minister and the minister's wife! Two little boys with their fathers did look at us with great interest. The men, however, were there only to worship. I shall never forget July 4, 1975, at Zamalek Mosque.

After the Prayer, Dr. El-Biali took us to meet the imam, who insisted on expressing his hospitality with light refreshments. His young understudy was full of questions about our work in the United States. We invited him to visit us. The imam explained that in the sermon he had spoken of Moses and Jesus Christ as well as Muhammad.

In the six days remaining to our stay in Egypt, we met Egyptians in many walks of life; children, young people,

physicians, teachers and generals in the army of the Arab Republic of Egypt. We visited the oldest Coptic Church and the oldest Synagogue in Cairo, as well as the Mosque of Muhammad Ali in the Citadel of Saladin.

Our purpose in Egypt was to relate as much as possible to Muslim leadership and people. Before going to Cairo, it had not been my intention to become involved with the Christian mission in Egypt. I had visited Egypt in 1963 and had spent my time with missionaries and Coptic Christians. I preached in Alexandria and Tanta. It was important now, in the limited time at our disposal, to spend our time with Muslims and to become involved with them. After all, this was an opportunity without precedent to do just that. The brief contact we had with the Christian mission on this trip only underscored for me, as director of this program, the practical and appropriate necessity for giving priority to our relating to Muslims. Any other approach would have side-tracked and delayed our endeavors to build mutual trust between ourselves and the Muslims. Even so, time and strength did not permit us to do some things. Shaykh Abdul Haleem Mahmoud, Rector of Al-Azhar University and one of the central theological figures in the Muslim world, had been ill. Had we been able to stay in Cairo another week, we would have been able to see him.

On Saturday, July 5, we were interviewed for the first time for prime time (9:00 p.m.) on Radio Cairo by a very competent woman newscaster. The second interview for Radio Cairo came on Tuesday, July 8, along with an interview for the Cairo newspapers. Akhbar El-Yom is read everywhere in the Middle East and is to be found on the newsstands in Rome.

A word needs to be said about Radio Cairo. It is the most important radio voice of the Muslim-Arab world. Using conservative figures, it is known that 30 million Egyptians listen to Radio Cairo. Cairo itself has a population of eight million. At the same time, persons in the remotest villages and hamlets to which electricity has not yet come have transistor radios. Radio Cairo puts out its signal on both the broadcast band and short-wave. Persons from the Middle East but living in California follow it regularly.

Radio Cairo is listened to and carefully monitored in the capitals and major cities of North Africa and the Mid-East: Rabat, Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli, Ankara, Istanbul, Beirut, Amman, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Damascus, Baghdad, Teheran, Khartoum, Kuwait, the Persian Gulf States and Riyadh. The areas indicated have a recognized listenership for Radio Cairo of 130 million people.

Typical questions put to us on the radio interviews

were: "What are the purposes of Inter-religious Dialogue?"

"What are the positive results of this dialogue in the American Scene?" "What are your hopes for peace in the Mid-East?"

I utilized the Resolution of the National Council of Churches Executive Committee of December 13, 1974, for my answer to this last question. First, I would comment on the question itself, placing it in the context of Christian, and indeed Judeo-Christian-Islamic, concern. Then I would state that the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. had a position on the matter. Then I would quote major sections of it verbatim.

On Wednesday, July 9, my colleagues and I spent most of the day being video-taped for a prime time television program to be shown on Cairo television on Saturday night, July 12.

Mrs. Grose and I and Rabbi Abrami left Cairo on Friday, July 11, two days earlier than originally planned, in order to fulfill certain commitments in Europe and New York City before returning home. Dr. El-Biali stayed on in order to spend some time with his family. Soon after we left, he called on the president of the Egyptian broadcasting system and expressed to him our thanks for the dramatic break-through which had been accomplished.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply thankful for the understanding and commitment my wife, Elinor, gave to this venture. She accepted the challenge and brightened many days. My colleagues, Muhsin El-Biali and Leo Abrami, showed in full measure the loyalty and trust which has grown between the three of us. Dr. Joseph Hough, Dean of the Southern California School of Theology at Claremont, and Dr. William Weiler, Executive Director of the Office on Christian-Jewish Relations of the National Council of Churches have encouraged and supported our work at all times.

### RESULTS

- A. Rabbi Abrami, Dr. El-Biali and I have been invited by Elaine Blancy to return to the Ecumenical Institute at Chateau de Bossey for summer 1976 to lead a two-week session.
- B. According to official feedback, our work in Egypt had a positive impact. We will go back to Egypt

to pick up where we left off, to consolidate and continue the gains made this summer.

- C. On August 30, I received word that we are invited to work in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, summer 1977. The message came through Dr. El-Biali's friends in the Royal House.
- D. Because of the break-through accomplished by our work in Egypt this summer, representatives of the Inter-Religious Council of Southern California will be able to go to Egypt in January. Up to this time, they had for four years been attempting to secure an invitation, but to no avail.
- E. Rabbi Abrami, Dr. El-Biali and I have new and fresh awareness of the religious situation in the Mid-East, particularly as it pertains to inter-religious dialogue and the place of religion in personal and political dimensions. These dimensions will become part of our dialogue work this fall in Indiana, Los Angeles, Toronto, New York, and Boston.

These are the immediate positive results. Of course, one does not know the far-reaching consequences. Almighty God protected us from many pitfalls and dangers,



known and unknown, and granted to this mission a beginning measure of accomplishment. For all the good in it to Him belongs the praise.

#### FINDINGS

The matter of any Muslim-Christian dialogue in Egypt is a very sensitive area. Approximately one-twelfth of the population are Coptic Christians. After the Suez conflict of 1956, few Jews remained in Egypt. Figures on the Jewish population in Egypt today range from 6,000 to 400. They are elderly and live quietly to themselves.

At the same time, the fact of the invitation of the Supreme Council to my colleagues and myself to come to Egypt to interpret dialogue between Judaism, Christianity and Islam demonstrates far-sighted leadership at certain important levels in Egyptian society and governmental infrastructure.

A Muslim nation (Turkey being the possible exception) does not acknowledge in law or in practice any separation of Church and State. Egypt is officially Muslim and the Constitution so states. Minority religious groups have the right to exist and to perpetuate themselves, but not to expand through the conversion of Muslims. A Muslim nation is by intention and in most respects in action a "total" society in which the official religion, Islam, affects every facet of life.

Important leadership in Egypt knows that a rapprochement between the religions of the Mid-East is an essential ingredient in eventual stability.

Egypt earnestly desires a state of peace; havoc has been wrought in the domestic economy by almost twenty-five years of a state of war. However, Egyptians have a strong national will to recover the lands taken by Israel in the 1967 war. Nevertheless, there exists at this time no strong hatred of Jews.

Egyptian morale is very high. The effectiveness of the Egyptian army in the latest war against Israel was very reassuring to Egyptian self-esteem.

Made buoyant by hopes of an equitable peace settlement, realizing their own pivotal position in the Arab world and believing in the mutuality of friendship with the United States, Egyptians are devoting themselves vigorously to the up-building of their own domestic life. Some Egyptians are looking forward to an Islamic renaissance.

The Nasser era prompts little nostalgia. Some Egyptians expressed to me that Nasser was a great patriot but not good for the country.

Anwar Sadat is very popular. Everywhere we went, Sadat was spoken of with respect, esteem and affection. His moderate but firm leadership in the Arab world is an important factor in the stability of the whole region.

His political power base in Egypt is strong.

Egyptian intransigence against communism can be counted on. This arises in large part from Muslim piety and the central place of Allah in the consciousness of Egyptians. In this way, Islam is a political force of great proportions.

Friendship between Egypt and Saudi Arabia is solid. Saudi oil money is coming into Egypt.

The Egyptian people whom we met were unfailingly gracious and thoughtful. We came to love them, even in our brief stay.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE HERMENEUTICAL POSITION

It seems well to get into the question of the interpretation early on. Numerous references in the New Testament to "Scripture" were in every instance quotations from or paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible called now the Old Testament. In so far as possible the same methods of interpretation will be used in this study for both the Old Testament material and the New; this is consistent with both being Scripture.

In what sense are the Scriptures, Old Testament and New Testament, the Word of God? The Scriptures are the Word of God in a derivative sense. That is, they are subordinate to and utterly dependent upon Jesus Christ the incarnate and living Word. The Scriptures are only the Word when they bear faithful witness to the mighty acts of God and to the Son of God. Even then they are derivative. The Scriptures were written by men guided by the Holy Spirit, but the words are the words of men. The Scriptures are, nevertheless, testimony without parallel and deserve thoughtful and careful attention.

The Scriptures relate a special history. The

special quality of this history is variously described by contemporary theologians in terms of revelation and historical reason (Richard R. Niebuhr, Resurrection and Historical Reason); heilsgeschichte, salvation history (Oscar Cullmann and others); and inner history with external history (H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation). Cullmann writes, "The whole of everything that is said about death and eternal life stands or falls with a belief in a real occurrence, in real events which took place in time."<sup>1</sup>

I do not think that the early Church, or for that matter the writers of the Old Testament, saw a separation between profane and sacred history. Much of our distress over this matter arises from the present scientific world view which holds so much store by what is called objective reality as compared to subjective awareness. It may be that a profound subjectivity is a more trustworthy guide to what is real in history than any other. Richard R. Niebuhr points out that the study of history does not lend itself to the methods of the physical sciences. He instead proposes that there is a different link between substance and method for Christian theology: "The contention of these chapters is that the hermeneutics of the New Testament

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<sup>1</sup>Oscar Cullmann, "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead," in Krister Stendahl (ed.) Immortality and Resurrection (New York: Macmillan, 1965) p. 10.

resurrection tradition and the principles of historical method appropriate to theology as a whole must be forged together."<sup>2</sup>

The radical historical criticism of the Bible in the twentieth century has not hurt the faith of the Church but instead has sought to remove the encumbrances of the centuries which are between us and the patriarchs, prophets, the life of Jesus and the work of the apostles. Because many cultural and philosophical movements have appeared in the time intervening between the resurrection and our time and because we are all affected by the spirit of our own generation, a direct approach to Scripture may find us reading into Scripture what we expect and want to find there. That is, the direct approach may be eisegesis rather than exegesis. Krister Stendahl writes on this problem as follows:

Not only in the study of the Scriptures but also in the study of Plato and the highly honored representatives of the classical tradition, there was for centuries a 'direct' approach. In these writings one found out how things really were or should be... Harnack was one of the last great exponents of this 'direct' approach. Along such lines it remained almost impossible to allow for the fact that many of the views which Jesus and the apostles considered central to their faith were very different from and even 'unacceptable to' modern man.

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<sup>2</sup>Richard R. Niebuhr, Resurrection and Historical Reason (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), p. 3.

Barth's theology, Bultmann's demythologizing, John A. T. Robinson's Honest to God are all in their own way answers to the recognition of historical scholarship that the world of ancient texts...must be understood in their own terms before we ask the question about relevancy for later ages, our own included. A two step approach is called for. First: What did a Jesus, or a Paul, or a Plato think that he thought? Second: What have their texts and the ideas contained in them come to mean to Western culture and what could they mean today? This distinction between an original meaning and later understandings has contributed greatly to our historical knowledge and fairness; it has made the problem of hermeneutics a crucial one in contemporary discussion.<sup>3</sup>

What is the bridge between earlier meanings and present understanding? If there is a bridge, which way does the traffic go? On which side of the bridge does the hermeneutical authority lie? As we have seen, the New Testament resurrection tradition is the seat of authority for Richard R. Niebuhr. My own position is close to his, but I would express it in this way. I base it on the "full time" theme in salvation history. "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his son...(Galatians 4:4a) This is again expressed in Ephesians as God's "economy"--plan: "For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on Earth." (Ephesians 1:10) The time fully come is an

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<sup>3</sup>Krister Stendahl, "Introduction", in Stendahl.

eschatological phrase. Jesus embodied the kingdom which is coming in his own person. He is Lord of the "fullness of time. Thus the "fullness of time" is now, moving toward the end. It is unique, unrepeatable time: kairos. This kairos sheds light on and interprets all other times since all other times lead to the "fullness of time" as consummation. The Lordship of Christ and the "fullness of time" are my hermeneutical guides.



## CHAPTER IV

### THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

#### A. Listening for the Sake of Abraham

On December 11, 1975, Rabbi Abrami and Dr. El-Biali and I lectured together at Boston College on the theme "Judaic, Christian and Muslim Perspectives on the Mid-East." The Jesuits were gracious and perceptive about the intentions of our work. In my part of the evening I stressed the importance of Abraham for the whole theological framework of dialogue: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. I further observed that Abraham was a shadowy figure in the religious consciousness of many Christians. Afterwards, the Rev. Francis Sweeney, S. J., came up to me and told me how much he loved Abraham and how much that part of the Mass which spoke of Abraham meant to him. I asked him to send me a copy of that part of the Mass. Here it is.

Father, we celebrate the memory of Christ, your Son.  
We, your people and your ministers,  
recall his passion,  
his resurrection from the dead,  
and his ascension into glory;  
and from the many gifts you have given us  
we offer to you, God of glory and majesty.  
this holy and perfect sacrifice:  
the bread of life  
and the cup of eternal salvation.

Look with favor on these offerings  
 and accept them as once you accepted  
 the gifts of your servant Abel,  
 the sacrifice of Abraham, our father in faith,  
 and the bread and wine offered by your priest  
 Melchisedech...<sup>1</sup>

Abraham is the primordial figure in the history of monotheism. He is the friend of God. (II Chronicles 20:7; James 2:23) He was "true in faith (hanif, a monotheist). (Quran 3:67) Abraham was obedient to his calling: "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing and by you all the families of the earth will bless themselves. So Abraham went out..." (Genesis 12:1-4a) To the promises of God Abraham responded in faith. "And he believed the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness." (Genesis 15:6) Indeed, the sagas of the patriarchs take their life from the promises of the Lord and recount the kind of faith responses the patriarchs gave.

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<sup>1</sup>Eucharistic Prayer I (Roman Canon), in The Sacramentary. The Roman Missal Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Council and Published by Authority of Pope Paul VI.

Jews, Christians and Muslims will listen to one another because they each have a claim on the other because of Abraham. Further, they--Jews, Christians and Muslims--have a camaraderie together because of Abraham who is "our father in faith" for all three. I use the word camaraderie instead of community because Judaism, Christianity and Islam continue to be distinct communities. Yet one can begin to renew that old phrase of the modern "Christian" West, "The Judeo-Christian tradition," and begin to speak of "The Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition." It is into this territory that we go as we consider listening for the sake of Abraham.

For Christians a theological interpretation of the significance of Abraham is governed by the canon--the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Christian Church does not accept the Quran as Scripture, and so from the point of view of Christian theology there is no other course. Nevertheless, it follows that, for the sake of Abraham, Christians will listen to what the Quran says about Abraham.

The narratives about Abraham in Genesis come to us in the form of Saga. Gerhard von Rad commends saga in this way:

Suspicion of saga begins as a rule with doubt concerning its 'historical' content. It is considered a product of poetic fantasy, and as such it has at best a broken relation to historical reality, or none at

all...by no means is saga merely the product of free-ranging fantasy; it...conjures up history. Of course it does not feel bound by the modern demand for exactness. Its roots are in a form of society preceding that of the state...(Saga) is...a view and interpretation not only of that which once was but of a past event that is secretly present and decisive for the present...It is the saga, much more than historical writing, that knows this secret contemporary character of apparently past events; it can let things become contemporary in such a way that everyone detects their importance, while the same events would probably have been overlooked by historical writing...For there is another history that a people makes besides the external of wars, victories, migrations, and political catastrophes. It is an inner history, one that takes place on a different level, a story of inner events, experiences, and singular guidance, of working and becoming mature in life's mysteries; and for Israel that meant a history with God...And one can say that the prerogative of the saga over all 'more exact' traditions is just to preserve these imponderable, intimate experiences from a people's youth. Thus occasionally the things of which the saga take possession are trifling. And yet, even then it is often concerned with facts and events of much greater inner significance than many things that history (Historie) puts down, because they have a longer after-effect and therefore remain decisive for the existence of posterity. There is often an entire world of events--actual, experienced events!--enclosed in a single saga. The saga, therefore, has a much higher degree of density than has history (Historie).<sup>2</sup>

Saga incorporates "inner history" as von Rad explains it. Jews and Christians have the same Abraham saga. Christians share with Jews and Muslims the same "inner history" of Abraham--to some extent--although the saga in the Quran resembles but is not the same as the Genesis narrative. We will now proceed to see in what way and to what extent Abraham is sharable, and who Abraham is.

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<sup>2</sup>Gerhard von Rad, Genesis (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), pp. 32-34.

Genesis presents itself as a series of narratives with profound theological import. Chapter one through Chapter 12:4a may be understood as the primeval history of the human race. Chapter 12:4b to the end of Genesis cover the promises to the patriarchs and the story of Joseph. Joseph is the transition from the time of leading by the Lord to the time of deliverance, commandments, and conquest of the Promised Land. Joseph foresaw a re-entrance of the Land of Promise for he took an oath of his brothers: "God will visit you, and you shall carry my bones up from here (Egypt)." (Genesis 50:25)

Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all of the families of the earth will bless themselves. (Genesis 12:1-3)

Since the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden, man has abounded in sin. Cain slays his brother, Abel. "Every imagination of the thoughts of his (man's) heart was only evil continually." (Genesis 6:5b) The flood was necessary in order to destroy the human race except for Noah's clan. Even so thereafter the descendants of Noah built a tower in the land of Shinar--with its top in the heavens--as a mark of their vaunting pride over against the Lord, the Creator. There is no respite from man's iniquity and the Lord's judgment.

And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men had built. And the Lord said, 'Behold, they are one people, and they have one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing they propose to do will now be impossible for them...' So the Lord scattered them abroad... over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because the Lord confused the language of all the earth. (Genesis 11:1-9)

Misunderstanding as a consequence of Divine wrath is everywhere. There is no repentance and no word of grace. Such is the Yahwistic picture of this primeval history of all the nations and peoples of the inhabited earth.

Abruptly our vision of disturbed humanity, scattered and confused, misunderstanding God and one another, is focused in on one man, Abraham. The Lord calls him to go; to depart from Haran; to abandon all customary securities: country, clan and immediate relatives. It is not enough to say the Abraham is here symbolized as a personification of Israelite clans.<sup>3</sup> No; it really is Abraham here with his whole story brought together by the Yahwist in short compass. Moreover, this compact account is bursting with theological reflection. The Lord says, "Go..." Abraham went. As it is written by the Yahwist, there is no quid pro quo--no deal. It is not that Abraham will go if he is

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<sup>3</sup>Cuthbert A. Simpson, "The Book of Genesis; Exegesis," in Interpreter's Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1952), I, 571.

promised certain benefits. Abraham is simply obedient. He submits to the Lord's command and will. "So Abram went..." (Genesis 12:4a) This is in contrast to mankind's otherwise universal rebellion as depicted in the build up to the Tower of Babel. The Lord's election has entered history, and Abraham's story and all that follows in its train now become the history of salvation. The promise of land and innumerable descendents is renewed by the Lord in several episodes while the promises of blessing for all the families of the earth by Abraham is set forth only here and in the climax of Abraham's testing: the almost sacrifice of Isaac. "...And by your descendents shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves, because you have obeyed my voice." (Genesis 22:18) The call and thus the election of Abraham begins in particularity: one man out of the human race. But it moves directly to bring to light God's goal for all of human history although without any description of the final end: "By you all the families of the earth will bless themselves (will be blessed)." (Genesis 12:3b) This prophecy from the Yahwist source, "which points to a fulfillment lying beyond the old covenant, was especially important to the retrospective glance of the New Testament witnesses."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Rad, pp. 159-161.

Of the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Isaac is given the least biographical material and in some ways is a transition figure. Jacob-Israel becomes the father of twelve sons whose descendants are the twelve tribes of Israel, the Israelites. However, "Abraham is not an eponymous ancestor and gives his name to no racial group. He is truly 'the father of the faithful'."<sup>5</sup> There are no "Abrahamites." Abraham is thus free to be identified with everyone who believes the Lord as Abraham did. The heritage of Abraham is a heritage of faith in God which hovers over and gives the only authenticity to an elect people. Ethnicity in itself is insignificant. It may be made significant only by God's call.

1. Abraham and Isaac. Abraham as the recipient of the promises straightway is put to the test. In fact his life, as given, is a series of tests. When famine hit the land of Canaan--the land promised to his descendants--as an act of unfaith he and Sarai went down to Egypt. Abraham demonstrated further unfaith by presenting his wife as his sister in order to save himself from the threat of death. Pharaoh took Sarai into his harem but on receiving great afflictions returned her to Abraham. He then ordered Abraham and Sarai out of the country.

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<sup>5</sup>S. H. Hooke, "Genesis," Peake's Commentary on the Bible (London: Nelson, 1964), p. 195.



In such a way is Sarai, as the ancestress of Abraham's descendents to whom belong the promises, both jeopardized and saved. (Genesis 12:10-20)

Abraham then defeats Chedorlaomer and his allies thereby rescuing Lot and his tribe. Melchizedek gives Abraham a blessing by "God Most High." The Scripture continues, "After

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, 'Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward (gift) will be very great.' But Abram said, 'O Lord God, what wilt thou give me, for I continue childless...?' The Lord brought Abram outside of his tent and said, 'Look toward the heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your descendents be.' (Genesis 14:13-20; 15:1-5)

There follows a statement fraught with meaning for the Christian Church; it may also contain the theological climax of Abraham's life:

And he believed the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6)

While this statement applies to all that Abraham is to himself and to us, it is noteworthy that, in its immediate context, Abraham does nothing except follow God's bidding to gaze at the stars in the middle of the night. "Belief" then is an "act of trust, a consent to God's plans in history..."namely, to make of Abraham a great people; Abraham "has firmly assented" to that, i.e., he took it seriously and adjusted to it. In so doing he

adopted, according to God's judgment, the only correct relationship to God.<sup>6</sup> This is "righteousness." "According to the Old Testament the saddig (righteous person) does justice to a relation in which he stands. If God abides by his covenant, acts according to the covenant, then he is 'righteous,' i.e., gracious. If man stands in right relation to God, i.e., believes, trusts God, then he is 'righteous.' Righteousness in this sense is not a juridical term of relation but rather a theological one."<sup>7</sup> One could paraphrase Genesis 15:6 by saying, "He believed the Lord; and therefore, according to the Lord, he is righteous."

In Genesis 17:1-8 the Priestly source describes the call to Abraham in terms formal and extended as compared to its parallel in the Yahwist source, Genesis 15:7. "Covenant" is a prominent word in the Priestly source. "The Hebrew word is more appropriately translated 'obligation,' 'promise'..There is not necessarily a relationship of parity between those who subscribe to the covenant;... it often happens that the more powerful member extends the covenant relationship to the weaker." This relationship has three possibilities. A. This obligation can be assumed one-sidedly by one party toward another. B. It can also be enjoined on one party by another. C. It can be adopted mutually by both parties. In both the Yahwist

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<sup>6</sup>Rad, p. 185.    <sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

use of "covenant" (15:18) and in (p) 17:2-3a we find possibility A.<sup>8</sup> "And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.' Then Abram fell on his face." (17:2-3a) ' Abraham surrenders unconditionally.

This promise is furthered by the birth of Isaac, and to that we turn (Ishmael will be discussed separately). The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre in the heat of the day as three strangers. Abraham is told that in the spring Sarah will have a son. Both Abraham and Sarah laughed at this promise. Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah 90. "The Lord said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh, and say, Shall I indeed bear a child now that I am old? Is anything too hard for the Lord?'" (Genesis 18:1-14) "Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac (he laughs). I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him." (Genesis 17:19) "...Through Isaac shall your descendents be named." (Genesis 21:12b) Thus the place of Isaac and his descendents, the Israelites, is clear-cut and unambiguous. They are heirs of the promises to Abraham.

Abraham raise Isaac. God is true! However, Abraham now faces his greatest test. "he (God) said,

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 199.

'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." (Genesis 22:2) The narrative in dramatic simplicity lays out every step including the knife in Abraham's hand. Then the angel of the Lord said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me," and a ram caught in a thicket was sacrificed in place of Isaac. The Lord reaffirms his promises, but without mention of the land: "I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants...and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves (be blessed)." (Genesis 22:3-18)

The almost sacrifice of Isaac is rich in implications. Abraham had already gone out leaving his past behind him. (12:1ff.) In the call to sacrifice he is asked to give up his future as well, for Isaac is the link to the promised greatness of Abraham's seed.<sup>9</sup> By his obedience to God's command Abraham demonstrated that he could give back the gift of God's promises, that he knew that the promises were indeed a gift and not his by right.<sup>10</sup> Abraham, in receiving Isaac back again from the Lord, had experienced a foreshadowing of the resurrection to a new life in Christ.

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 239.    <sup>10</sup>Ibid, p. 244.

2. Abraham and the Christian Faith. Since I have stated that the Lordship of Christ and the "fullness of time" moving toward the "last things" are the criteria of interpretation, the hermeneutical key, for me and for this study, how does Abraham fare in these Christian terms? Abraham is locked into the New Testament. The Gospel according to Matthew begins, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" in order to show that Jesus is rightfully the messiah.

Abraham and his heritage constitute the foreground of the preaching of John the Baptist: "Bear fruit that befits repentance, and do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father;' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham." (Matthew 3:8-9)

When Jesus encountered the faith of the centurion in Capernaum, he said, "Truly I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 8:10b-11) In saying this Jesus gave a full eschatological interpretation to the promises of God through Abraham. Jesus based fellowship with the patriarchs in the kingdom squarely on faith!--faith like Abraham who believed God. "Abraham's bosom is the place of rest for the faithful

departed of Israel." (Luke 16:23) At the same time, Abraham is the servant of God's revelation in Christ: "Jesus said to them, 'Before Abraham was, I am.'" (John 8:58) In Jesus the promise of the land of Canaan is amplified: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." (Matthew 5:5) The blessings of the children of Abraham now include the ultimate blessing of the end time: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." (Matthew 5:8)

There exists a very close connection between Galatians and Romans in the way the Apostle Paul uses the Old Testament and develops his arguments. "Thus Abraham 'believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.'" (Genesis 15:6) So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham...'In thee shall all the nations be blessed.'...Men of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith." (Galatians 3:6-9) Paul then boldly claims that Christ is the offspring of Abraham par excellence: "Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, 'And to his offsprings,' referring to many; but, referring to one, 'And to your offspring,' which is Christ." (Galatians 3:15-16) This is how Paul illuminates faith in Christ by

which Gentiles are gathered into the promises.

For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ...And if you are Christ's then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (Galatians 3:26)

In Romans chapter 4 Paul begins his development of the doctrine of justification by faith by again quoting Genesis 15:6. The promises of land to Abraham and his descendents is expanded in eschatological anticipation to "inherit the world." (Romans 4:13)

That is why it (justification) depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be gathered to all his descendents--not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham... (Romans 4:16)

It (righteousness) will be reckoned to us who believe in him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification. Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 4:24-5:1)

The Apostle Paul sweepingly gathers together Abraham, covenant and promises as he writes to the Corinthians: "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him (Jesus Christ)." (II Corinthians 1:20)

What is the relationship of the Old Testament believers to the salvation wrought in Christ? D. M. Baillie writes:

It is not that the historical episode (the death of Christ) is a mere symbol of something 'timeless'; it is actually a part (the incarnate part) of the eternal divine sin-bearing. But it would be quite false to

think of any moment of human history as having no direct relation to this divine sin-bearing, which transcends the temporality of past, present and future without destroying it...The medieval teaching was that...the benefits of the Atonement were not yet available because the sacrifice on Calvary had not yet been made...But Reformed theology rejected all that, and taught that Old Testament believers had no such waiting...They not only looked forward to it (His Atonement), but actually received, as truly as we do, the forgiveness and salvation which it brought.

[Baillie refers to Calvin in a footnote:]

The scholastic dogma...by which the difference between the sacraments of the old and the new dispensation is made so great, that the former did nothing but shadow forth the grace of God, while the latter actually confer it, must be altogether exploded. (Institutes IV, 14, 23)<sup>11</sup>

The Old Testament believers "both had and knew Christ the Mediator, by whom they were united to God, and made capable of receiving his promises" (Ibid., II, 10, 4) Abraham belongs in Christianity. John Calvin lays it on the line:

Now what could be more absurd than for Abraham to be the father of all believers (cf. Genesis 17:5) and yet not to possess even the remotest corner among them? But he cannot be removed from their number--not even from the very highest rank of honor--without wiping out the whole church.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>D. M. Baillie, God was in Christ (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), pp. 192-193.

<sup>12</sup>John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), p. 437.



3. Judaism and Abraham now. Are the people of Israel still children of Abraham notwithstanding their rejection of Jesus as the Christ? Paul affirms emphatically that they are.

They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed forever. Amen. (Romans 9:4-5)

For the gifts and call of God are irrevocable.  
(Romans 11:29)

I understand the Apostle Paul to mean that the Jews have been placed in suspended animation, so to speak, with reference to Christ. This was done by God so that the full number of the people of the nations (the gentiles) may come in. By "suspended animation" I mean simply that the Jewish response to Jesus as the Christ has been put in abeyance. But this historical fact does not give Christians who have come from among nations any occasion to boast. They are wild olive shoots which, by the grace of God in Christ, have been grafted into the richness of the olive tree, Israel. This is a great mystery in which God is to be glorified: "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways!" (Romans 11) The Pauline testimony would seem to undercut any concentration by the Christian Church on the conversion

of the Jews. There will be further examination of this in the Chapter "Speaking for the sake of Christ." The Jews and Judaism have not been separated from Abraham.

"I ask, then, has God rejected his people (the Israelites)? By no means!" (Romans 11:1a)

4. Abraham and Ismael. Ishmael will be considered now, after the sections on Abraham and Isaac and Abraham and the Christian Faith, not for textual reasons but for historical reasons. Islam, called by John of Damascus "The Heresy of the Ismaelites" began, according to Quranic revelation, with this verse given in 632 A.D.--the year of Muhammad's death:

This day have those who  
Reject Faith given up  
All hope of your religion:  
Yet fear them not  
But fear Me.  
This day have I  
Perfected your religion  
For you, completed my  
Favour upon you,  
And have chosen for you  
Islam as your religion.  
(Quran 4:5)

The story of Ishmael is given in Genesis 16 (J) and given again with similarity but difference in Genesis 21 (E). In Genesis 15:4b the Lord promises Abraham "...Your own son will be your heir." Chapter 16 begins, "Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children..." It appears that Sarai did not believe the Lord's promise. After all, they had been

ten years in the land of Canaan. Abraham was eighty-five years old, and Sarai seventy-five.

Sarai said to Abram, 'Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my maid; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.' And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai.  
(Genesis 16:2)

Hagar conceived and then looked with contempt on Sarai, her mistress. Sarai dealt harshly with Hagar and she fled from her. The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness and told her to return to her mistress. The angel of the Lord also said,

I will so greatly multiply your descendents that they cannot be numbered for multitude...behold, you are with child, and shall bear a son; you shall call his name Ishmael (God bears); because the Lord has given heed to your affliction.  
(Genesis 16:4-11)

The story of Ismael in Genesis 21 may be summarized in this way: The boy Isaac grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on that day. However,

Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had born to Abraham, playing with her son, Isaac. So she said to Abraham, 'Cast out this slave women with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac.'

Abraham was very displeased.

But God said to Abraham, 'Be not displeased because of the lad and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your descendents be named. And I make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring.' Abraham the very next morning rose early, gave Hagar bread and a skin of water. He put it on her shoulder, along with the child,

and sent her away. She wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. When the water was gone, she put Ishmael under a bush. She sat a bow-shot distance away so as not to look upon the death of a child. Ishmael cried, and God heard him. The angel of the Lord said, 'Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him fast with your hand; for I will make him a great nation.' Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water...And God was with the lad, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt. (Genesis 21:8-21)

Abraham was fond of his first-born and said to God,

'Oh that Ishmael might live in thy sight!' God said, 'No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him and make him fruitful and multiply him exceedingly; he shall be the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year. (Genesis 17:18)

One long-standing interpretation of this material is that Ishmael is simply a foil for Isaac so that Isaac can be seen more clearly as the child of promise. Ismael is, in that case, perceived as the child of flesh; that is, Ishmael is Abraham's child all right, but born of impatience with God and not a covenant son. Sacred history follows the line of Isaac; Ishmael is part of profane history; Abraham is the progenitor of sacred history and of a secular history. The Apostle Paul was making another point by comparing Hagar, Mount Sinai and the Jerusalem of his time to being in slavery, whereas Isaac and the heavenly

Jerusalem represent freedom in Christ. (Galatians 4:21-5:1) Paul's forced exegesis in these passages has nothing to do with the matter at hand except in the way that he juxtaposes Isaac and Ismael: "Now we, brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh (Ishmael) persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit (Isaac)..." (Galatians 4:28-29) The role of Ishmael to be over against Isaac has been standard doctrine ever since. If we leave it at this, then plainly Ishmael and his spiritual descendents, the Muslims, do not share in the sacred history of promise with Abraham, but are sustained, like the rest of humanity, by a general providence.

However, there may be other ways to come at the place of Ishmael. After all, the patriarchal traditions do not seem to want to let go of Ishmael. His place deserves more scrutiny. One way is to ask the question, "Apart from his contrast with Isaac in birth and mode of life, does Ishmael participate in the promises of the Lord to and through Abraham? And, if so, how?"

One mark of covenant between the Lord and Abraham and his descendants are the words "to be God to you and your descendants..." (Genesis 17:7 b) Isaac will live in God's sight. Cf. (Genesis 17:18) "And Abraham said to God, 'O that Ismael might live in thy sight!'" But God

indicated that Isaac instead would have that relationship. But, curiously, the Scripture is not consistent, or at the very least is ambivalent, on this matter. The Lord places Ishmael in desperate straits from the moment of birth, but the Lord listens to Hagar (Genesis 16:11b) or Ishmael. (Genesis 21:17) The Lord comes to their rescue; a well of water appears by God in an extraordinary manner. Cf. Jesus at Jacob's well saying that he gives water that will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life. (John 4:14b) Finally, "God was with the lad (Ishmael)." (Genesis 21:20) Is there a difference between "to be God to you" and "God was with the lad"?

In the Priestly account, Genesis 17, God commands that every male in Abraham's household be circumcised as a sign of the covenant; otherwise he has broken the covenant. (This must mean that the males who were circumcised at God's command were within the covenant.) Isaac was not yet born, but "That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised." (Genesis 18:26) Since the promises were first given to Abraham without reference to circumcision (Genesis 12:1-8; 15), one cannot put too much weight on this line of thought; but the fact remains that Ishmael was included in, not included out, at this point.

These are the days of the years of Abraham's life, a hundred and seventy-five years. Abraham breathed

his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people. Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah... (Genesis 25:7-9a) (p)

Ishmael has appeared again. Peacefully he and Isaac bury Abraham. What of Ishmael's banishment to the wilderness? "Did P not know the tradition of Ishmael's ejection (Ch. 21), or did he consciously ignore it? Or does he suppose that Ishmael was present at Abraham's death?"<sup>13</sup>

Almost as an anti-climax Abraham took another wife, Keturah. Abraham's descendants by Keturah are listed in Genesis 25:2-4. Ishmael's posterity is handled differently:

These are the descendants of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's maid, bore to Abraham. These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, named in order of their birth: Nebaioth, the first-born of Ishmael; and Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. These are the sons of Ishmael and these are their names, by their villages and by their encampments, twelve princes according to their tribes. (Genesis 25:12-16)

In contrast to the Keturah list (Ch. 25:1ff.), the Ishmaelite tribes seem to be a closer alliance. The list mentions twelve tribes and speaks of twelve princes (v.16); So the Ishmaelites too may have formed some kind of sacred unit of twelve tribes, for 'prince!' as we know from the Old Testament, is the title of the religio-political dignitary and chief who represents the tribe in the college of chiefs of clan for the whole unit (Numbers 1:5-15; 10:14-26; 13:4-15; Exodus 22:27...) <sup>14</sup>

Ishmael has his own "twelve tribes."

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<sup>13</sup>Rad, p. 262.      <sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 262-263.

It is not conclusive, according to the Old Testament that Ishmael is a child of promise as Isaac is. The Apostle Paul does not affirm it. (Cf. Galatians 4:28-29) However, we have seen that Ishmael does participate in the sacred history through Abraham in strong and mysterious ways. If Ishmael is also a child of promise through Abraham, then the monotheists--Judaism, Christianity and Islam--are theological brothers up to a point and should listen to one another.

While the Quran is not Scripture for Christians, Christians should be aware of what the Quran says concerning Abraham and Ishmael. This is part of what it means to listen for the sake of Abraham. The Holy Quran of Islam states that Abraham was a muslim, for muslim means "one who surrenders to the will of God." Islam as a people, ummah, are those who have made this surrender and who have accepted Muhammad as the Prophet of God. Islam is a verbal noun meaning "the surrendered ones."

And remember that Abraham was tried by his Lord with certain commands, which he fulfilled: He said: 'I will make thee an Imam to the nations!..(Quran 11:124)

Imam means "leader in religion" and "example." Allah then discloses the relationship of Abraham and Ismail (Ishmael) to the Ka'ba in Mecca, the house of God.

Remember We made the House a place of assembly  
for men and a place of safety;  
And take ye the Station of Abraham as a place of prayer;



And We covenanted with Abraham and Ismail, that they should sanctify My House for those who compass it around, or use it as a retreat, or bow, or prostrate themselves (therein in prayer). (Quran II:125)

Abraham built the Ka'ba with Ismail's help.

And remember Abraham and Ismail raised the foundations of the House (with this prayer): 'Our Lord! Accept (this service) from us: For Thou art the all-hearing, the All-Knowing. Our Lord! make of us Muslims, bowing to Thy (Will), and of our progeny a people Muslim, bowing to They (Will); And show us our places for the celebration of (due) rites; And turn unto us (in Mercy); For Thou art the Oft-Returning, Most Merciful. (Quran II:127-128)

Islam claims to be the religion of the renewal of the faith of Abraham through the revelation (recitation: Quran) given to Muhammad, the last of the prophets of God. Moses and Jesus Christ are considered prophets. Islam in its origin called men and women out from clan loyalties to form a people, ummah--based on faith in the one God and the acceptance of Muhammad as the seal of the prophets.

The Apostle Paul wrote, "It is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham." (Galatians 3:7) Can this mean that Jews, Christians and Muslims are the sons of Abraham--the Jews by spiritual descent from Isaac, the Muslims by spiritual descent from Ishmael, and the Christians through faith in Christ? Since the historic monotheists share some "inner history," Christians should listen to Jews and Muslims for the sake of the promises to Abraham.

## B. Speaking for the Sake of Christ

1. Witness. On January 20, 1976, I had a conversation with Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, former Secretary General of the World Council of Churches. He had just returned from the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Nairobi, Kenya. I was interested in his perception of the attitude or feeling tone of World Council leadership on the matter of dialogue--apart from official pronouncements. First of all it must be stated that the World Council has a positive commitment to dialogue with non-Christian religions. Nevertheless, Dr. Blake stated that in the World Council there were two reservations about dialogue: (a) dialogue might be a screen for proselytizing and (b) dialogue might be a form of syncretism.

A theology of dialogue which breaks new ground and clarifies motives and alternatives is needed. Proselytizing and syncretism are very different from each other as problems. If dialogue is a screen for proselytizing, then conversion is sought based on certain claims to truth, and no combining is sought or desired. Syncretism, however, requires a search for the common denominator that it may be raised to the place of ultimate authority--other considerations being made relative. It further necessarily includes the effectual merger of doctrine and at least a

"spiritual overlap" of believing communities. From the point of view of syncretism all religions are "relatively absolute"--to use Frithhof Schuon's phrase.

The threat to honest dialogue may also come from another direction than proselytizing or syncretism as usually understood. The threat may come from presuppositions which lie behind the twin concerns that "dialogue is a screen for proselytizing" and/or that "dialogue is a form of syncretism." One set of presuppositions may be that theologically--from the Christian position--dialogue can only be a form of mission with the telos or end of making converts from another religion or religions; that this is what dialogue necessarily and always means to the Christian Church. "Proselytism" as the making of converts and "Proselyte" as a convert are derived from *προερχομαι*. It bears honorable usage in the New Testament.

The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; but he (Jesus) holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able for all time to save those who draw near *προσερχομένους* to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:23-25)

The usage is similar in Hebrews 11:6, 4:16 and I Peter 2:4. Those who think that the chief business of the Church is to make others draw near to God through Christ have some basis for the assumption. This activity has an antecedent in first century Judaism as reflected in

Matthew 23:15: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you traverse land and sea to make a single proselyte,..." There were also in the first century "God fearers", gentiles who attached themselves to the ethical monotheism of Judaism. Nevertheless, missionary activity, as such, has not been characteristic of Judaism. In the Holy Roman Empire Jews were forbidden to proselytize. I am told that in the Los Angeles area there are a significant number of persons converting to Judaism through the agency of "inquirers classes" but this activity is carefully not publicized by the Jewish community.

The Christian Church has from its historical inception been missionary. After Pentecost the twelve disciples are consistently termed "Apostles" (απόστολοι ) those who are sent on a mission. What has been called the "great Commission" is sufficient mandate:

And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age. (Matthew 28:18-20)

These are the words of Christ risen as kept by the Church. Prior to the Resurrection the mission of Jesus was to historic Israel:

These twelve Jesus sent out, charging them, 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep

of the house of Israel. And preach as you go, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' (Matthew 10:5-7)

Likewise:

And behold, a Canaanite woman...cried, 'Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely possessed by a demon.' But he did not answer her a word...He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' (He did relent): O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire. (Matthew 15:22-24;28)

It is clear that the great watershed is the Resurrection--leading in "forty days" to the Ascension to the "right hand of the Father," "For (Jesus) must reign (in mission) until he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death." (I Corinthians 15:25-26) This distinction between pre-resurrection and post-resurrection is of the utmost importance to the Church in its own self understanding. Moreover, this distinction is of paramount importance to persons of other religions--or humanists--in their attempts to understand the Church. One cannot pull apart the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith, and then take one's choice. The Christ of faith, he too has a history. It is the brief of the Church that Jesus of Nazareth and the risen Christ whom Thomas addresses as "My Lord and my God" are one and the same. Every indication is that the title "Lord" is a resurrection title.

...The sacred name Yahweh is always replaced in the Hebrew Old Testament by Adonai (Lord), and is translated in the LXX by Κύριος ...The title Κύριος came to be identical in meaning with the name of God himself. The New Testament took over this linguistic tradition but at the same time it applied to Christ the title Κύριος that in the Old Testament had been used of God...The consequences of this interpretatio christologica are far reaching in the extreme.<sup>1</sup>

As there were in the Roman world "gods many and lords many", the Christians had one Lord. As monotheists of a certain character, Christians understand that God is not dispersed. That Lord (Κύριος) is indeed the risen One is shown by the Apostle Paul:

And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus...every tongue (should) confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:8-11)

It seems clear that "Lord" is the title "bestowed" on Jesus by God the Father--according to the Pauline testimony--in keeping with his obedience unto death. The resurrection of Jesus by God the Father and the bestowal of the divine name are concurrent events.

As the first in order of all who will be raised, Jesus the Lord by his presence sets forth that the resurrection powers, the powers of new creation, have been loosed in the world. As Lord he "must reign" until all the enemies

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<sup>1</sup>Ethelbert Stauffer, New Testament Theology (New York: Macmillan, 1956), p. 111.

of God are subdued. (I Corinthians 15:25ff) His reign comprises both hope and actuality; promise and fulfillment; anticipation and consummation. The Church prays, "Maranatha-- O Lord, come!" (I Corinthians 16:22; Didache 10:6) and awaits his appearing (*παρουσία*). In the meantime Jesus grants to those who follow him shalom in himself. John 16:33 may be translated: "In the cosmos you will have pressure, but maintain a bold bearing for I have vanquished everything that stands opposed to God."

I suggest now a close look at the manner in which Jesus as "enthroned Messiah" and Lord exercises his authority in the interim between the resurrection and the consummation of the age with special reference to the ending of Matthew's Gospel, 28:16-20. The situation of Jesus in light of his exaltation is vastly different than anything the disciples had previously known of him. He now has (by action of the Father), "all authority in heaven and on earth." He, and they with him, are now to go to the gentiles--which, as has been shown, was not part of the program prior to the resurrection. Whether one perceives the ending of Matthew to be the ipsissima verba of Jesus or to be the mind of the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit or to be the literary construct of Matthew or of the "school of Matthew" there is no gainsaying the tremendous impact on the Church since its inception. The

"Great Commission" is given further weight by the fact that it is the genuine ending of Matthew, and Matthew is the only gospel with a true, intentional ending.

"Make disciples of all nations" might be paraphrased "Cause all nations to submit to your teaching." If this is what it conveys, then it has a definite catechetical ring and certainly infers a Christian fellowship and converts under instruction.<sup>2</sup> "Make disciples" is aorist imperative (*μαθητεύσατε*). The aorist tense may be understood as denoting "an event as a single whole, without regarding the time taken in its accomplishment."<sup>2a</sup> In this case the Church is to "be all wrapped up" in the task of making disciples--without regard to when the job may be finished. The task is mandatory.

That the Church will engage in this task is certitude. From among whom will disciples be made? "All the nations"! The gentiles, the goyim, are the fertile field for the harvest now. If this is the full intent of this

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<sup>2</sup>Pirke Aboth: Sayings of the Fathers (New York: Schocken, 1962). Chapter 1: "Moses received Torah from Sinai and delivered it to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets, and the prophets delivered it to the men of the Great Synagogue. These said three things; be deliberate in judging, and raise up many disciples, and make a hedge for the Torah (p. 19)." Herford comments, "To make disciples in the sense of imparting knowledge of Torah has always been both the aim and the practice of Rabbinism (p. 21)."

<sup>2a</sup>J. Moulton, Introduction to the Study of New Testament Grammar, p. 190, cited by J.E. Dana and Julius A. Mantey, A Manual Grammar of The Greek New Testament (New York: Macmillan, 1957) p. 194.



phrase, then it is apparent that Israel is not included as a mission field from here on out. Could one even say that the children of Abraham are not to be considered a field for mission? Or could this phrase imply that while the Church now has a mission which Israel did not have, the Church is yet coextensive with Israel? These questions were dealt with in part in the section on Abraham. However, this matter could not be overlooked at this point since the full sweep of Matthew 28:16-20 is under consideration. Jesus' declaration, "Think not that I have come to abolish the Torah and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them.." (Matthew 5:17) is consonant with the interpretation that the gentiles are to be converted.

Contained within the "Great Commission" are certain dimensions of a doctrine of the Church. It is the Church which will make disciples; The Church as the institutional expression of those who belong to the Lord (*ΚΥΡΙΑΚΟΙ*) has ever been involved in making disciples. And since Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, the Church became territorial in its extension and experienced the backing of civil authority. This generalization holds true even into the twentieth century in Europe. One could speak of the Christian lands even after one could no longer speak of "Christendom." From the perspective

of Islam the United States is a Christian country. (They insist upon this in spite of the doctrine of the separation of Church and State and the constitutional safeguards against the support of religion.) Often in the early Christian centuries missionaries preceded government control from Rome of the barbarian tribes. Nevertheless, from this association--the so-called Constantinian compromise--and from the fact that with the fall of Rome the Church stepped into the vacuum, the Church developed in some respects (I do make a serious qualification) an imperial style. During the medieval period in the Christian lands of Europe heresy was punishable; Jews were an isolated minority subject to many debilitating civil limitations, sometimes under persecution and sometimes the object of proselytizing: priests were wont to go into the ghettos to preach and attempt to make converts. It is my contention that some interpretations of the "Great Commission" have contributed to an imperial style for the Church.

Muslim Spain represents a challenging exception to the prevailing practice in Medieval Europe of oppression for Jews. The Omayyad Dynasty (755-1009) produced a climate of tolerance and mutuality. A dynamic culture developed with great advances in the study of Greek scientific writings,

medicine, literature--both Arabic and Hebrew, Biblical studies and architecture. "In numbers, wealth and prestige, the Jewish community in Spain became by far the greatest in the world."<sup>3</sup> Samuel ibn Nagdela was Grand Vizier of Granada. Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides), one of the greatest Jewish philosophers and Talmudists of all time, was Spanish in birth and education. He became physician to Saladin, the ruler of Muslim Egypt. His monumental work is The Repitition of the Torah, a systematization of the whole scope of Rabbinic law. In clarity of expression this work exceeds all other writings of this type. This period in Spain became known as the "Golden Age" of Judaism.

The reconquest of Spain as a whole by the Christian forces of northern Spain and the subsequent establishment of the Inquisition led to acute persecution of Jews, including many Jews who had become Christians (the Marranos). In 1492 the Jews of Spain were given the choice of baptism or exile. Seeing what had happened to many Marranos, most Spanish Jews chose exile. Most resettled in Africa, Turkey, Greece then under Turkish rule, and Italy (Christian). A similar treatment was meted out to the Muslim Moors of Granada: baptism or exile. The terms of exile were so unfavorable that most chose baptism although the Catholic Church was not equipped to give them much instruction. They were for a long time Christian in name only and

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<sup>3</sup>Bernard J. Bamberger, The Story of Judaism (New York: Schocken, 1974), pp. 157-158.

constituted a continuing threat to the Christian monarch.

Certainly not all abuses of the Jewish communities in Europe in the Medieval period can be traced to the interpretation of one text any more than the motivations of the Crusades can be laid to the Gospel of Christ. However, the magisterial style of the Church's mission--whether Catholic or Protestant--was shown as a dimension of the great missionary advance of the early twentieth century. The Christian missions had the greatest success in areas controlled or influenced by the Western colonial powers. In America in the early seventies many major Christian communions agreed to cooperate in a program called "Key '73." One slogan used by some was "Winning the Continent for Christ." On the whole the American Jewish community reacted with some alarm to this evangelistic program. I am sure that the program did not have the Jews as such in mind, but the history of the Church's efforts to convert the Jews was enough to give them pause even though the United States offers a climate both legally and culturally of religious liberty.

If in the Lord's mandate, "Make disciples of all nations," the Jews are thought to be Gentiles, then the implementation of the Great Commission is a very mixed blessing both for Christianity and Judaism.

Paul Tillich traces another line of development in

the Church vis-a-vis world mission. He takes his line of departure from the prologue of John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the word..." and shows how some Church Fathers emphasized logos in the Hellenistic rather than the Hebraic sense: rational truth rather than God's deed ("His word will not return to him void, for it will accomplish what he purposes."). According to Tillich these Church Fathers understood the logos as the principle of "Divine self-manifestation..." "Augustine could say that the true religion had existed always and was called Christian only after the appearance of Christ." Tillich claims that early Christianity did not consider itself as radically exclusive, but as the all-inclusive religion in the sense of saying: "All that is true anywhere in the world belongs to us, the Christians." He makes reference to Matthew 5:48, "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect," saying, "(This passage) would, according to recent research, be better translated, 'You must be all-inclusive as your heavenly Father is all-inclusive.'"<sup>4</sup> I sense that Tillich is perceiving this translation in relation to a Hellenistically informed logos theology; ie. rational truth is the same for all, everywhere. However, the context of the passage is ethics, not theology. We are told to love our enemies; to pray for our persecutors

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<sup>4</sup>Paul Tillich, Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions (New York: Columbia, University Press, 1963), pp. 34-35.

since our heavenly Father sustains both the evil and the good, the just and the unjust. We are therefore to imitate God in sustaining even our enemies. It is a case of applying a great ethical tradition in Judaism: Imitation Dei. We are taught to be all-inclusive in love. I think that a Christian universalism drawn from love has a much greater durability than the claims of a transhistorical logos understood as Divine principle or rational truth in which all humankind is included.

Christian universalism does not lead to relativism although Tillich in the work cited does not explain how this is so. He does point out that in the

...same early thirteenth century in which Pope Innocent III gave the model for Hitler's Nurnberg laws against the Jews, there was created by Christian, Islamic and Jewish forces the near-miracle of a tolerant humanism on the basis of current traditions at the court of Emperor Frederick II in Sicily... The great Cardinal and member of the Papal Court, Nichols Cusanus, was able in the middle of the fifteenth century, in spite of his being an acknowledged pillar of the Roman Church, to write his book, De Pace Fidei (The Peace between the Different Forms of Faith). He tells how representatives of the great religions had a sacred conversation in heaven. The divine Logos explained their unity by saying: 'There is only one religion, only one cult of all who are living according to the principles of Reason (the Logos-Reason), which underlies the different rites...The cult of the gods everywhere witnesses to Divinity...So in the heaven of (Logos-Reason) the concord of the religions was established'.

Tillich goes on to track a spiritual continuity with certain leaders in the Reformation period: Zwingli and Erasmus, who

acknowledged the work of the Divine Spirit beyond the boundaries of the Christian Church; the Socians who taught a universal revelation in all periods; and the leaders of the Enlightenment such as Locke, Hume and Kant who measured Christianity by its reasonableness and judged all other religions by the same criterion.<sup>5</sup>

This Logos-Reason theology has the aroma of a different world than most of the New Testament writings including the Gospel according to John. John's purpose in the Prologue seems to be to form a double association in the Incarnation between the Logos as God's active word (Hebraic) and the Logos as the principle of Divine truth and reason (Hellenistic). I think that it was a piece of responsible Christian apologetic with both the Jews and the Greeks in mind rather than a road by which the Church may travel into Hellenism. Tillich does aver, "It is natural and unavoidable that Christians affirm the fundamental assertion of Christianity that Jesus is the Christ and reject what denies this assertion."

It may be that the Jewish people as objects of conversion were only passively understood as such to the extent that the Church between the Apostolic Age and the rise of Islam in the seventh century was under the influence of Logos theology. However, this a-historical interest

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 40-41.

in eternal truth was given a rude historical shock when the Byzantine Empire collapsed before the Muslim onslaught. Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople and Jerusalem were now enjoying the Peace of Allah (dar-ul Islam). Spain and Sicily were soon to follow Palestine, Asia Minor and North Africa as conquered lands of Islam. The great North African, Augustine, lay on his death-bed singing Psalms while Muslim forces beat on the gates of his cathedral city, Hippo. Where Christianity began and the early bishoprics were now Islam, Christians therein became a protected but circumscribed minority.

Paul Tillich has a brilliant analysis of the sharpening effect of this encounter which bears directly on the relationship between Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

The victorious wars of the Islamic tribes and nations forced Christianity to become aware of itself as one religion confronted with another against which it had to defend itself. According to the law that defense narrows down the defender, Christianity became at this point radically exclusive. The Crusades were the expression of this new self-consciousness. They were the result of the first encounter of Christianity with a new world religion...The irrational character of the crusading spirit was confirmed by the fact that the narrowed self-consciousness, created by the encounter of Christianity with Islam, produced also a changed self-consciousness with respect to the Jews. Since the period of the New Testament, and expressed most clearly in the Johannine literature, a Christian anti-Judaism has existed, based, of course, on the rejection of Jesus as the Messiah by the vast majority of the Jews. Nevertheless, they were tolerated and often welcomed in the earlier period; the Church waited



for their conversion. But after the shock of the encounter with Islam the Church became conscious of Judaism as another religion and anti-Judaism became fanatical. Only after this was it possible for governments to use the Jews as political scapegoats to cover up their own political and economic failures, and only since the end of the nineteenth century did religious anti-Judaism become racial anti-Semitism, which was--and still is--one of the many ingredients in the radicalized nationalistic quasi-religion (Nazism, Communism).<sup>6</sup>

While Europe was in the so-called "Dark Ages" the Muslim empire moved toward its zenith only to be cut down by the sack of Bagdad by Hulagu the Mongol in 1258. Nevertheless, the polarization described by Tillich remained. Islam as a whole went into a period of quiescence until the demise of the Ottoman empire. Then after World War II and the decline of Western colonialism, Islam began to experience nationalism and the beginning signs of a renaissance. These historical forces only brought to light, as one would fan the embers of a fire, the mission of the Church to "make disciples." The intertwining destinies of Judaism, Christianity and Islam--historically and presently--are reason enough to seek an honorable mode of relating and communicating one to another.

I remember reading that Karl Barth had said of Bonhoeffer's Letters from Prison that they were "a particular thorn." Ever since our work of dialogue between Judaism, Christianity and Islam began in 1972 a New Testament

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 38-39.

passage has emerged as a focus of attention among college students, churches, synagogues and ourselves. My Jewish colleague is especially aware of it and in recent lectures in California and at the Commonwealth School in Boston has urged me to give a fresh interpretation. It is not the Great Commission--though one might well expect it to be in light of the Christian proselytizing propensities which it clearly reveals, as I have attempted to show.

The "particular thorn" is John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father but by me." I am still not quite sure why this is a more prickly passage than some others. It may be because this is a really religious claim--touching people in areas about which they are deeply concerned. If so, it is a tribute to the power of witnessing, for that is the character of the statement. Jesus is witnessing to himself.

John 14:6 is hardly a launching pad for the conversion of the world. It does not lay out a theological strategy for world conversion as does the Great Commission. It is just Jesus talking about himself--which he has every right to do. Every religious group has the right to its own self-definition. No one need be crowded by a religion defining itself. It is in the nature of religion to do so. In this case, some non-Christians may want Jesus to say something different about himself. But if a person is not

a Christian, what difference does it make what Jesus thinks of himself? Unless, of course, some non-Christians attribute to Jesus an authority they do not care openly to admit. Let him be! In the vernacular of the counter-culture of the early seventies, "Let Jesus do his own thing!"

Dialogue requires that one not attempt to make a religious tradition not one's own conform to an image alien to itself. And certainly there is nothing to be achieved in trying to make Christianity conform to Judaism or Judaism conform to Christianity--or Islam conform to Christianity or vice versa. Perish the thought!

If Jesus Christ has been made "The head over all things for the church, which is his body..." and since we have life, and that abundantly, and bear much fruit as we "abide" in him, how then are Christians to bear the fruits of fidelity to the Church's proper mission? The Great Commission of the Lord as kept and framed by the Matthean tradition raises serious and important questions about the doctrine of the Church. As I have shown, when the Church began to "make disciples", it developed, under the conditions of its historical existence until modern times, a magisterial style. The latter days of the twentieth century call for a new style. As Jesus witnessed to himself, so are Christians called upon to witness to him, to witness to the mighty acts of God--in word and deed. Our

time calls for witnessing rather than making disciples. If making disciples is a teaching, catechetical task-- then the Christian community has "jumped the gun" for a long time in its understanding of the Great Commission. That is, the witness of the Church and the convincing power of the Holy Spirit goes before anyone becomes a catechumen. Otherwise, the command to "make disciples" issues in Christian activity which is both moralistic and coercive: One "ought" to be a Christian; one "must" be a Christian. One could go on at length about the ill-effects of this approach. Providentially, there have been Christians in every period who understood the place of witness as the precursor and sine qua non of the teaching and sacramental authority of the Church. With this understanding it will be seen that there is a plenary commission from the Lord which takes precedence over "Make disciples." (Matthew 28:16-20) It is:

So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them, 'It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.  
(Acts 1:6-8)

According to the "Little Apocalypse" (Matthew 24), so important is the witness style of mission that the consummation of the age awaits its completion: "And this

gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come." Leslie Newbigin, a minister of the Church of Scotland and first bishop of the Church of South India writes,

The Church is not the instrument of God's governance of the world, but the witness of his governance both by speaking and by suffering...This does not, however, mean that the Church is to play a merely passive role in relation to the events of the world. Christians are called, with their Lord, both to preach and to act. The preaching of the Gospel to the whole world is the witness to the cosmic nature of what God has done in Christ. It is the witness to the fact that 'what Jesus began to do and to teach' was not just one of the strands that make up human history, but the disclosing of the true end of that history...It is of the essence of the specifically missionary task that it involves crossing over into another human situation, in which the Gospel has to be articulated in terms of that situation. This readiness to relate the Gospel with constantly new human situations is an essential part of the Church's witness to the character of what God has done for all men in Christ. Without this, the Gospel becomes too easily denatured by a process of domestication.<sup>7</sup>

The "new situation" Of our time which draws our attention in this project is the renewed significance and high visibility of the great religions. As the special focus is the monotheistic grouping so far as this project is concerned, one could say that Christianity will avoid being "too easily denatured by a process of domestication" through dialogue with Judaism and Islam.

Acts one discloses that the risen Christ tells the apostles that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, they

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<sup>7</sup>Leslie Newbigin, Trinitarian Faith and Today's Mission (Richmond:John Knox Press, 1963), pp. 42-43.

will be witnesses to him in Jerusalem (among the Jews)... Samaria (among outcast, heretical followers of Moses) and to the end of the earth (everybody else). This is the ecumenical vision--rediscovered in this century--which is the basis of reunion of the Church and the furtherance of its mission. (John 17:20-23) Ecumenical derives from *οἰκουμένη*, the whole inhabited earth. In Christian usage, according to Bishop Newbigin, this has always meant "The whole inhabited earth to which the gospel is sent." What I have called the Plenary Commission calls for Christian witness--in both word and deed--among all peoples.

By my exegesis of Matthew 28:16-20 regarding Israel and my interpretation of the covenant children of Abraham, I have endeavored to show that Christians are not required to "make disciples" of Jews and Muslims.

I have at the same time discovered (Acts 1:6-8) that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Christians will witness to the Lord Jesus with Jews and Muslims--as well as with others.

I have further discovered thereby a cardinal distinction. That is, the distinction between conversion and witness. Conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit. "...And no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (I Corinthians 12:3b).

Witness is the task of the Christian.

Who then are we, as Christians, to arrogate to ourselves the work of the Holy Spirit?

I am aware that there are great hermeneutical questions involved here, but also great opportunities here to best embody the blessed Gospel in dialogue with Jews and Muslims. Krister Stendahl in a paper given to the Lutheran World Federation meeting in Oslo (August 1975) states:

I have chosen...to reflect upon how one as a Christian or how one Christian lives with the Bible, because there is a living relationship, an interplay, between the faith and the scriptures, and the church and the scriptures through the ages. It is naive (in the bad sense) to think that there is no such, but that the Bible is there as an objective given and that settles all questions.<sup>8</sup>

The Church is free to make fresh interpretations of witness.

The distinction that I now make between conversion and witness has proven to be a liberating force with Rabbi Abrami and Dr. El-Biali and myself as we work together and among the people with whom we work in dialogue. Stendahl in his Oslo paper, "In No Other Name," with reference to Acts 4:5-12 continues:

Here is a confession, not a proposition. It is a witness, strangely enough not actually an argument, but just exactly a witness. I was asked earlier in our conference what I thought about the call to mission...I have special difficulties with the so-called mission to the Jews, but I certainly have no difficulty with my love to speak about Jesus, and I have no hesitation to do so while together with Jews. Whether I would like to call this mission is another question. A witness is what we have in this passage, a witness which can be easily understood out of the convictions of the experiences.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Krister Stendahl, "In No Other Name," Paper given at Lutheran World Federation, Oslo, August 1975, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup>Stendahl, p. 9-10.

I believe that the liberating force of the distinction between conversion and witness should be part of any theology of dialogue.

I am told that some Christians are now lifting up the theme "Beyond Ecumenism." This theme is very likely raised with regard to a possible new stance, Christianity vis-avis the other religions. To ask, "Is there something beyond ecumenism?" may be to assume that dialogue is not part of ecumenism. In my discussion of Acts 1 and Matthew 24 I have shown that testimony, along with the unity of the Church, is the ecumenical vision. Many people think of evangelism as a heavy-handed affair, associating it with a misconception of Matthew 28:16-20, or that evangelism is the real business of the Church while dialogue is an exotic form of recreation in which we engage with friendly competitors. If witness to the good news in Christ is what evangelism actually is rather than what some may think it is, then to separate evangelism from dialogue is unreal. Nevertheless, this is what George Rupp seeks to do.

...An endorsement of dialogue does not in itself preclude the view that traditional evangelism is appropriate in at least some contexts...Such missionary activity must, however, be differentiated from the program of dialogue; for there is a significant difference between the intentions of the two enterprises.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>George Rupp, Christologies and Cultures Paris: Mouton, 1974), p. 258.



Likewise, the Recommendations to the Churches of Section III, Seeking Community - The common Search of People of Various Faiths, Cultures and Ideologies, World Council of Churches, Nairobi, December 1975, distinguishes dialogue from evangelism (e):

Continued reflection, on a regional and local basis, on the relation between dialogue and evangelism, taking into account experiments in actual dialogue with people of various faiths and ideologies.

But dialogue is, at least, a mode of witness---and an exciting one. If a "witness" happens, someone has to be around to bear witness to the witness. This is what partners in dialogue do for one another. They listen to one another. Jews, Christians and Muslims speak each to the others on the basis of these central testimonies:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord Our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

(Shema. Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.

(John 20:30-31)

Say: He is God, The One and Only;  
God, the Eternal, Absolute;  
He begetteth not, Nor is He begotten;  
and there is none like unto Him.

(Quran. Sura 112;1-4)

And Muhammad is the messenger of God.

(Shahadah. Open Testimony)

Christians will speak for the sake of Christ.

2. Syncretism. Christians have from the beginning of the Christian era stood against syncretism; yet it has been a constant temptation as the Church has sought to communicate with persons of other religions or philosophies. Gibbon wrote "The various modi of worship which prevailed in the Roman world were all considered by the people equally true, by the philosophers equally false, and by the magistrates equally useful." The problem is prevalent in American society because of a climate of pragmatic humanism and the subtle, but none the less real, influence of the religions of the Orient. Hendrick Kraemer has written:

For both (the Eastern philosophies and the modern scientific mind as the typical creation of the West), God and revelation, His presence and activity in history, His relation to man and man's relation to Him, are irrelevant...<sup>11</sup>

Declaring his position by the title of his book, The Transcendent Unity of Religions, Frithjof Schuon writes, "In other words we can say that 'Christ' who for the Hindus will be Kalki-Avatara and for the Buddhists the Bodhisattva-Maitreya, will restore the primordial tradition."<sup>12</sup> Schuon perceives Christ as one manifestation of the Divine essence, or he may mean that manifestations of the Divine in all religions are expressions of the 'Eternal Christ' as Divine

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<sup>11</sup>Hendrik Kraemer, World Cultures and World Religions (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 368.

<sup>12</sup>Frithjof Schuon, The Transcendent Unity of Religions (New York: Pantheon, 1953), 104.

essence. I am not sure which. Schuon makes and follows two definitions. Religions have an exoteric form: doctrines, rituals, and traditions. Religions also have an esoteric (inner, confidential) form. The perspective of Schuon seems to be that Judaism, Christianity and Islam are bound to be a mutual denial--in their exoteric forms. But their esoteric forms are the same: one Divine essence. However, this Divine essence which lies behind and within the exoteric forms can be known to only a few spiritually advanced souls. The esoteric reality is not for the mass of humanity. They have only the exoteric forms.

Schuon confuses "form" with historical event. History is for him a lower category of reality--perhaps even metaphysically illusory (Maya). The position of Schuon is only a recrudescence of gnosticism (salvation by secret knowledge). It was, in principle, laid to rest for Christianity by the Apostle Paul when he closed his Letter to the Romans with this ascription:

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed and through the prophetic writings is made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring obedience to the faith--to the only wise God be glory for evermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

For the revealed religions, the religions for whom history is profoundly meaningful as the theatre of God's

action and revealing, the question of combining or syncretizing is remote. It is not in the spirit of Judaism, Christianity or Islam to seek to combine.

Let us look now at another theme which is beginning to emerge for discussion: "The Wider Ecumenism." If it means to be inclusive in love, then it is a much needed dimension of what ecumenicity is all about. However, if it means to sit loose on the convictions that people hold dear because it is believed that the "Divine Principle" has inspired all litanies and made each revelation "relatively absolute", then the "Wider Ecumenism" will be a move toward eclecticism and syncretism. Syncretistic possibilities and temptations exist in the encounter of Christianity with Hinduism and Buddhism since they characteristically relativize the significance of history and man's place in it. Syncretism is a betrayal of the Gospel. However, a religion that cherishes a Red Sea Crossing; a religion which cherishes a crucifixion; and a religion that cherishes the memory of the Battle of Badr--each event being to the adherents of the respective religion a conclusive sign of Divine grace--will never deny the discrete and mighty acts of God as determinations of human blessing and destiny.

I remember a question put to my colleagues and me by the MC of a California television program. He asked,

"Are you fellows interested in combining your religions and making a new one?" We answered, almost with one voice, "Never!"

In concluding this section on dialogue as witness, I refer back to a concern of some in the World Council of Churches that dialogue might be a screen for proselytizing. I have shown that witness in word and deed is the normative form of mission for the Church. Dialogue is a mode of witness. Dialogue may be one of the best forms of Christian witness at this time in relation to Judaism and Islam. Not one of these historical, revealed religions has any inherent tendencies toward syncretism.

In May 1970 the World Council of Churches sponsored the Zurich Consultation which produced the memorandum entitled "Christians in Dialogue with Men of Other Faiths." The document seeks to identify some of the major theological issues in dialogue and states that "there is an understanding of mission which neither betrays the commitment of the Christian nor exploits the confidence and the reality of men of other faiths."<sup>13</sup>

3. The Substance of Witness. The Resurrection of Jesus is at the heart of apostolic preaching. And "Lord" is the title of the risen Christ as has already

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<sup>13</sup>S. J. Samartha, "Introduction", in his Living Faiths and the Ecumenical Movement (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1971), p. 8.

been shown. It is the title of governance and authority: "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18) and "He is Lord of all." (Acts 10:36B) On the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit had been given, Peter addressed the multitude saying, "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses." (Acts 2:32) The Apostle Paul reminds the Corinthians of what he has already told them which of first importance:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve...Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

(I Corinthians 15:3-8)

For the apostles, witness is witness to the resurrection of Christ Jesus--in the context of God's previous activity through the patriarchs and the prophets.

In the resurrection accounts of Matthew and Mark the angelic figure declares: "He is risen!" (Matthew 28:6; Mark 16:6) That is, having once been raised, he is still risen.

In our time as well the good news is expressed: Jesus is alive! Not some vague spirit, but he himself is alive. Very God and very man--without boundary. Nevertheless, docetic thinking is still present in the Christian community. Docetism is the doctrine that Christ only seemed (*dokéō*) to die; that he only seemed to rise.

This view tries to take strength from Jesus' cry from the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

(Psalm 22:1) This was rendered in the apocryphal Gospel of Peter as: "My Power, My Power, why have you forsaken me?" This position was amplified in the apocryphal Acts of John which describes Jesus as appearing to John on the Mount of Olives while his body was apparently being crucified on Golgotha. On the matter of the Resurrection, Paul Tillich appears to create a docetic atmosphere. A resurrection requires an historical person. D. M. Baillie thinks that Tillich regards Christology "as quite independent of the question whether Jesus ever existed as an historical personality at all."<sup>14</sup> Tillich writes in The Interpretation of History: "'To practice Christology does not mean to turn backward to an unknown historical past or to exert oneself about the applicability of questionable mythical categories to an unknown historical personality'."<sup>15</sup> The unique thing about Jesus is that he is the bearer of the "New Being." The New Being overcomes the estrangement between man and God. Since Jesus is the bearer of the New Being and not the New Being itself, New Being almost fits the category of "My Power, My Power" to which Jesus appealed as he died

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<sup>14</sup>Baillie, pp. 78-79.

<sup>15</sup>Baillie, p. 78.

according to the Gospel of Peter just cited. That is, the bearer can be separated from the New Being just as "My Power" can be separated from the docetic Jesus. The only way that Tillich can discuss the Resurrection is to say:

In an ecstatic experience the concrete picture of Jesus of Nazareth became indissolubly united with the reality of the New Being...But this presence does not have the character of a revived (transmuted) body, nor does it have the character of the reappearance of an individual soul; it has the character of a spiritual presence.<sup>16</sup>

To me, such an interpretation does not allow for very God and very man--without boundary. I reject Tillich's position because it portrays only a seeming incarnation and only a seeming resurrection.

In making the claim that witness is witness to the risen Lord who is very God and very man without boundary, I am not making a superlative claim about the Church in history, for the Church is subject to sin and error and is in constant need of forgiveness and the renewing guidance of the Holy Spirit. Although I would not use the word "absolute" because of its authoritarian connotations, I feel that Hendrik Kraemer is getting close to the mark when he says, "What is absolute...is not Christianity but the Revelation of God in Jesus Christ. He has no need of our proofs. He simply reigns...even were no one to recognize the fact."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957)-II, 157.

<sup>17</sup>Hendrik Kraemer, Why Christianity of All Religions? (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 116.



Jesus is Lord. If we had chosen him and made this claim, we would once more have built our own tower into the heavens; and once again our self-justification in choosing Christ would have done us in. Such a claim, such a witness, can only be grounded in His choosing us as an act of sheer grace.

Christians will speak for the sake of Christ.

## CHAPTER V

### GOAL

The goal of our work is to establish a pattern of dialogue between the communities of Judaism, Christianity and Islam so that the living God may be magnified and all his might acts more clearly perceived through the religions of historic revelation.

This goal is sought in the trust that it is God's will for our time. One could say that the goal is to establish peace between these theological cousins. However, such a goal is not the goal but one of its possible corollaries. One must not place a gift of God before God himself. To seek peace as the goal of dialogue may be compared in this American bicentennial year to the "pursuit of happiness." Peace, like happiness, is illusive unless a higher loyalty claims us. When we say peace, we mean political peace, territorial peace and peace of heart. It is the shalom, salaam, of God. If such peace is only our struggle, then we are humanists. Peace is God's eschatological peace. It is a gift of the end time, a time when:

He shall judge between the nations...and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword

against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. (Isaiah 2:4)

But they shall ist every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid.  
(Micah 4)

For the Christian, talk of peace also conjures up the powerful image of the kingdom of God.

Among those born of woman there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven manifests itself powerfully and keen and daring men take hold of it. (Matthew 11:11-12)<sup>1</sup>

The shalom of God is a fruit of the kingdom. It must be given before it can be takne. But the kingdom has broken in on us in the person of Jesus. "Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.'" (John 20:19b) This peace is God's saving action. It is of the new age; it is of resurrection power. Since God the Father has raised Jesus of Nazareth, "The first (in order) of those who have fallen asleep," (II Corinthians 15:20b) resurrection power is unleashed in the world. The phrase "first fruits" is a mistake. The phrase is instead an allusion to a military column. The commander leads the column. He is first in order.

Nevertheless, the kingdom in its fullness is not yet. "It is not for you to know the times and the seasons

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<sup>1</sup>Krister Stendahl, "Matthew," in Peake's Commentary on the Bible (London: Nelson, 1964), p. 784.

which the Father has fixed by his own authority...But you shall receive power...and you shall be my witnesses."

(Acts 1:7-8) And with that we are right back to the matter of witness. Whatever is accomplished to magnify the name of God through dialogue toward reconciliation and peace will be both a real victory and a partial victory. Both victory and failure in this area rest in providence. Toil in dialogue between Judaism, Christianity and Islam may be faithful witness to the resurrection powers of the new age; it can be a sign calling attention to the graciousness of God in the midst of human history and a sign arousing hope for the fulfilling of the reign of God; a sign of the love of God. Christians in dialogue with Jews and Muslims are called to steadfastness, to faithfulness. Jews, Christians and Muslims all testify that God is a keeper of promises.

The Christian can say to the Jew and to the Muslim, "Tell me about Abraham and his faith in God." The Christian can also say to the Jew and the Muslim, "Let me tell you that Christ is the surety and the affirmation of God's promises." "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him." (II Corinthians 1:20a)

The Jew, the Christian and the Muslim--by the fact of entering into dialogue--bear witness, each to the others, that we should go out like Abraham. The outcome is in God's hands. Dialogue will bear fruit--Deus volente.

Objective A.

To foster a climate of dialogue between Judaism, Christianity and Islam in American colleges and universities through lecture commitments.

Strategy 1. Communicating with academic, administrative and student leadership by telephone and letter. This has been done extensively. A new brochure is being produced which will be widely circulated.

Strategy 2. Enlisting the help of my friends and colleagues in academic life to this end. I have done this at every opportunity and have not been disappointed.

Strategy 3. Seeking representative commitments wherever possible in order to reach various dimensions of academic life and thus also to open avenues for future work. We have just begun to think in these terms. We have lectured at three Protestant seminaries and one Catholic. We were invited to Union Theological Seminary in December 1975 but had to cancel. I intend to renew our opportunities in the New York City area--especially seminaries and graduate schools of religion. We are invited to Georgetown University in the fall of 1976. I will cultivate my contacts in Washington, D.C.--again especially seminaries and graduate schools of religion. We should

begin to give seminars. We are invited to offer a weekend seminar at University of California, Berkeley.

On the whole we have done very well with Objective A. Since 1971 my colleagues and I have lectured together at sixty-five American colleges and universities. I want us now to do a more in-depth job: seminars, special courses, retreats.

Objective B.

To be in meaningful conversation with American Church leadership at the national level.

Strategy 1. Establish an official relationship for myself as originator and director of this program with the Office on Christian-Jewish Relations, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. This has been a working relationship since January 1975.

Strategy 2. Be in regular contact with United Presbyterian leadership since I am Presbyterian. The Presbyterian Program Agency co-sponsored our lecture at the Inter-Church Center in June 1975. I will be seeing them again in May.

Strategy 3. Seek other national denominational contacts whenever possible. The United Methodist Church

is showing an interest in our work and may video-tape one of our lectures. I will follow through on this.

As the Churches at the national level endorse the kind of dialogue we represent, others may embark on dialogue between Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and we will have many doors opened to us. So far, we have made a modest beginning at the national level, but we have been well understood by the national church leadership with whom we have worked so far.

### Objective C.

To develop dialogue situations in or among Protestant Churches at the regional and local levels.

Strategy 1. Lecture for local churches. This has hardly happened. It took two years of negotiation for me to arrange our first lecture in a major Protestant church in Los Angeles. But it was a very exciting evening. The members tried to convert my Jewish colleague but not my Muslim colleague--which is interesting.

Since 1971 we have been invited to speak by only four Protestant churches. This is partly because, up to now, I have concentrated on academic situations; but it is also because colleges and universities have shown themselves more responsive to our work. I have a pastoral relationship with two of the churches which sponsored us.

Strategy 2. Lecture for my presbytery and synod.

My strategy here is to begin at home before branching out. Presbytery does not have the funding, but presbyterial (Women's organization) has a genuine interest and will probably invite us. Some on the appropriate presbytery committee were concerned about the gospel being proclaimed adequately under the conditions of our dialogue! Strange, for I cannot think of better company with whom to witness! Synod seriously considered inviting us, but opted for a different program for this Bicentennial year. The door is open for reconsideration for next year. Working with the churches is now very much on my conscience. I will make every effort in the coming year to penetrate the opacity which the Church at the congregational level represents.

Objective D.

To be in meaningful conversation with the staff of the World Council of Churches in Geneva.

Strategy 1. Meet with World Council leadership.

This has been done. See Geneva dialogue with Dr. Visser t'Hooft. We will be in Geneva again in July 1976 to meet with others.



Strategy 2. My colleagues and I gave a lecture last summer at the Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches, Chateau de Bossey. We will go again this summer to participate in a consultation of Biblical theologians entitled "The Justice of God and the Justice of Man."

Objective E.

To develop positive relationships with the Jewish community in the U.S. and abroad.

Strategy 1. Work through Rabbis whenever possible for lecture commitments. Rabbis are just beginning to trust us, and then only a few. The synagogues are no more and no less open to us than the churches.

Strategy 2. Lecture together at Brandeis University, Hebrew Union College and Jewish Theological Seminary. I worked diligently to arrange for us to lecture at Brandeis last year--only to have them cancel us out. Their reasons for cancelling were practical, and, I am sure, valid. However, there were other aspects of the negotiations that gave my colleagues and myself some concern. An initial letter from a school official read in part:

We are always happy to welcome guest clergy and to promote a spectrum of opinion for the students, but we are concerned that no student's sensibilities be offended and that no aggressive proselytizing occur..."

We will wait for a while before we talk with Brandeis again. The thinking of responsible people at Hebrew Union College and Jewish Theological Seminary is not yet known as it may pertain to our dialogue.

Strategy 3. Go together to the State of Israel. The political situation in the Mid-East makes this strategy not viable at the present time.

Objective F.

To maintain contact with, and work in, the Muslim world.

Strategy 1. Visit major Muslim countries together and officially. This we were able to do the summer of 1975, for we were invited to Egypt. The uncertainties of the international situation make it difficult to predict at this time whether or not we will go to a Muslim country in the next twelve months.

Strategy 2. Lecture at one or more Muslim universities. This strategy has to do with a special situation; namely, that major Muslim universities are also centers of Muslim theology and law. This strategy can only actualize after delicate exploratory conversations and additional bonds of mutual trust.

## CHAPTER VI

### SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE WORK ON THE GOAL

The American culture has tried to find a way for Judaism and Christianity to get along. The National Conference of Christians and Jews, founded in 1925, has done an extraordinary job in furthering countless community projects of mutual concern and would not have been possible without a great reservoir of good-will among both Jews and Christians. Indeed, one of the finest experiences my colleagues and I have ever had was sponsored in November 1972 by the Detroit Roundtable of the National Conference of Christians and Jews of which Charles Benham is the director. He was able to get co-sponsorship from Wayne State University, the Detroit Council of Churches, the Board of Rabbis, the Islamic Center and the Archdiocese of Detroit of the Roman Catholic Church. According to Mr. Benham, our work there opened the way for further work in dialogue throughout the Detroit urban area.

Many things have happened in the world scene to constructively affect the climate for dialogue. The Christian Church has expressed a serious desire to relate in positive fashion to other world religious communities--

most particularly Judaism. In 1961 at New Delhi the World Council of Churches stated its responsibility toward the Jews. The World Council has since established a committee on the Church and the Jewish People of which Dr. Franz von Hammerstein is the executive and Dr. Krister Stendahl, Dean of Harvard Divinity School, is the chairman. The Vatican, implementing Nostra Aetate, the declaration on the relationship of the Church to non-Christian religions (1965), is seeking every opportunity to foster positive relationships with Judaism and other world religions.

At the Vatican the Commission on the Jewish People is part of the Secretariat for Christian Unity while work with Islam is included in the Secretariat for Non-Christians. At present then, administratively, Judaism is close in to matters of the visible reunion of the Church; but Islam is grouped together with Buddhism, Hinduism and others. This means to me that, theologically, the Catholic Church does not yet chose to highlight the special relationship which exists between the monotheistic religions of revelation. The Cartigny Consultation of the World Council of Churches, October 24-28, 1975, among other declarations said,

These two dialogues of Christians with Jews and Muslims should converge into a three-way dialogue aiming at greater understanding among the three monotheistic religions. This could make a unique contribution to reconciliation and peace in the Middle East, and in the world at large.

Abrami, El-Biali and I have been working in that vineyard since 1971!

As the World Council of Churches and the Vatican increasingly acknowledge that Judaism, Christianity and Islam are together a special case, the work of dialogue between the three will be greatly enhanced. I think it providential that the Program for Inter-Religious Dialogue, which is the formal name for the work my colleagues and I do, is associated with Office on Christian-Jewish Relations of the National Council of Churches. That is where it belongs. We also have a new association with the Blaisdell Institute for the Study of World Cultures and Religions in Claremont, California. This should prove very fruitful academically and lead to a beginning exploration on our part of our theological stance vis-a-vis Buddhism and Hinduism.

However, as it stands, a symbiotic relationship seems to exist between Christianity and Judaism. This phenomenon is particularly noticeable in the U.S.

What do we do with our Muslim cousin? He is suddenly visible again after being many centuries absent from Christian consciousness. Are Christians and Jews willing to move over a little bit in order to let Islam into the family circle? Or will political considerations militate against this? In July 1975 my Muslim colleague, Dr. El-Biali, explained over Radio Cairo that the foundation for dialogue with Jews and Christians is to be found in the

Quran, and he so interpreted Sura XXIX:46 which reads:

And dispute ye not  
 With the People of the Book (Jews and Christians),  
 Except with means better  
 (Than mere disputation), unless  
 It be with those of them  
 Who inflict wrong (and injury):  
 But say, We believe  
 In the Revelation which has  
 Come down to us and in that  
 Which came down to you;  
 Our God and your God  
 Is One; and it is to Him  
 We bow (in Islam).

From a Christian point of view, Islam is no more an outsider than is Judaism as I have tried to show in the historical and theological material of this project. Islam belongs in this card game along with Judaism and Christianity. The stakes are high in this game, and either everybody wins or everybody loses. While the Muslim population in the U.S. is not great--perhaps one million--it may be time for the eight million Jews together with the predominantly numerous Christians to be more inclusive with regard to the Muslims. For example, there is no religious reason to stand in the way of changing the National Conference of Christians and Jews into the National Conference of Jews, Christians and Muslims. Maybe this is future shock, but there should be room on the park bench for all three cousins.

What needs to be done over all is to see Judaism, Christianity and Islam in one panoramic view.

## CHAPTER VII

### IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCHES

#### (What the Churches Can Do to Help)

The churches may cultivate listening to both Jews and Muslims on religious matters--which constitute even now a largely unexplored dimension of the political crisis in the Middle East. Listen because of the promises to Abraham. So long as the Old Testament is in the Bible, Abraham is our spiritual ancestor. The Church of the Apostles was in dialogue with the Scriptures of the Jews--both in their Hebrew and Greek forms. The New Testament is replete with quotations from and interpretations of Old Testament material. Let the Church be apostolic once again in this regard. The reasons for so listening surpass sentiment and neighborliness. The reasons lie in salvation history which did not begin with the Christian Church.

It is not enough to listen only to Judaism. The Church must also listen to Islam. Muhammad was told that he would be a warner of the judgment of God and a reminder of God's previous dealings with the Jewish people and the Church, i.e., the people of the Book. Let the Church explore the question of whether or not the Quran

reminds us of the things of Christ and the ways of God the Father. To this end I suggest that Church school curriculae begin to include more of the history of Judaism, some information about the Quran, the life of Muhammad, and the contribution of Islam to Western civilization. Islam may be on the verge of a renaissance after centuries of dormancy. Christians should try to understand what is going on.

Judaism and Islam have been largely unaccustomed to having the Church listen to them seriously. It will have a certain constructive shock value and open up many new avenues for dialogue. Once they find us listening, the synagogue and the mosque will more readily give us a hearing as we speak of what we know of the things of Christ.

If the vitality of Judaism and the vitality of Islam are in the providence of God, could it be that Christ (He is Lord of all) is and will be addressing the churches through Islam and Judaism? If God once chose to work through Balaam's ass, he can surely convey to Christians a message now and then from the only spiritual cousins the Christians have got; namely, the other two monotheistic religions of historic revelation.

Abraham and Jesus Christ are not comparable. Jesus, speaking of his pre-existence as the eternal Son, said, "Before Abraham was, I am." But Abraham was the friend of



God. And so we say to the churches: "Because of Abraham listen to Judaism and Islam; for Christ's sake speak to the Jews and the Muslims. Embrace these liberating terms of dialogue!" And our speaking will be non-coercive, for real witness is like that. And everyone is entitled to his own testimony. The profound witness of both Judaism and Islam is to be hearkened to and respected as it both confirms and conflicts with the person of Christ.

Until the dawn breaks and the shadows flee away, Christians will ask, "Where is Jesus to be found?" Could it be that he is at the rim of history where the future is being worked out?

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